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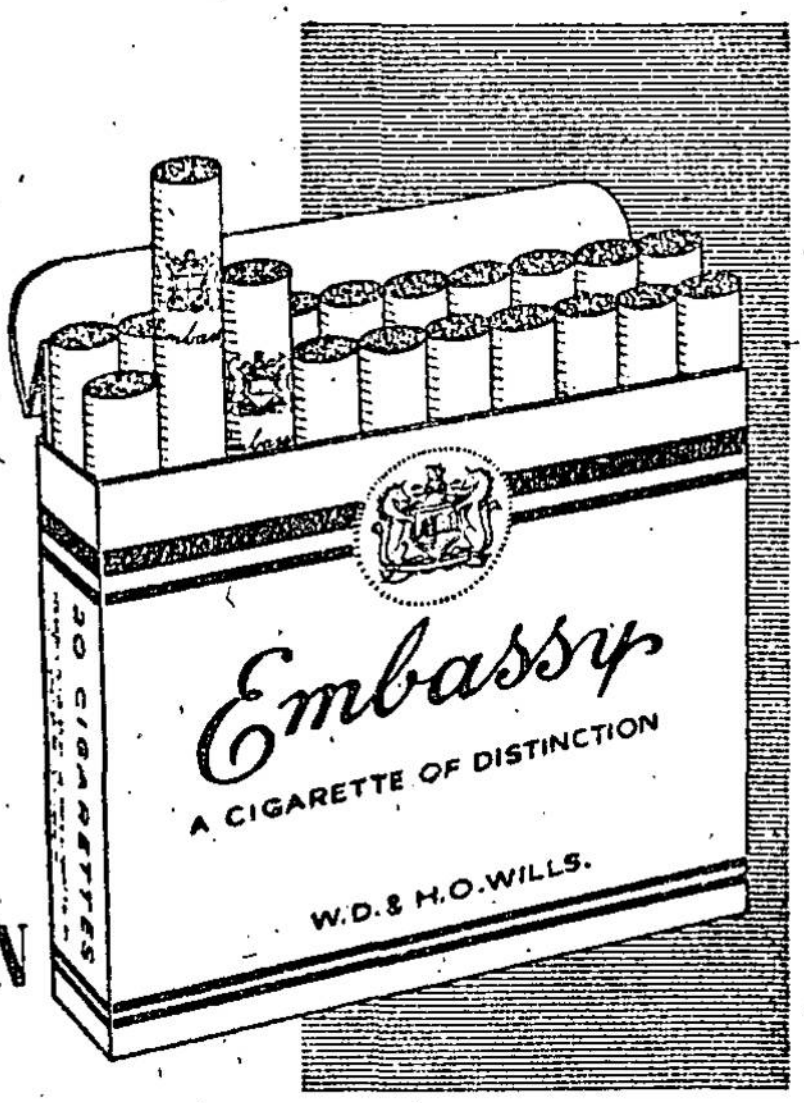

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ARGOSY

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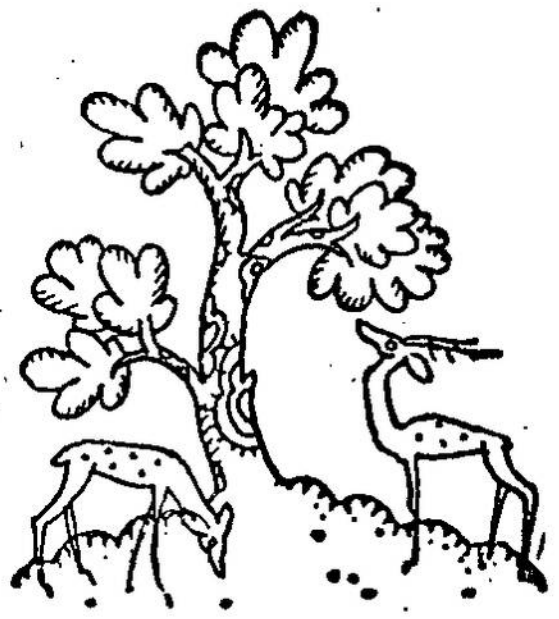

Spring Shadows

THE shadows of the woods are glowing now,
Again, beech-leaf and moss, with violets;
Under the thorn the primroses are lying
Again in the bright bliss of the gendering sun;
The year forgets
The unbudded bough,
Forgets the long prophetic labour done;
The sapling rod
In peel and pith quickens, a passion crying,
No more in winter continence to dissemble;
And love, half-satyr and half-god,
Goes crashing through the brake, his young limbs flashing,
And all the Dryads tremble.

JOHN DRINKWATER

NIGHT PIECE

"'Twas this way, your honour," she said

by ELIZABETH MYERS

ONE Sunday night an old woman was sitting in her parlour reading a nineteenth-century novel and biting her nails. A gas-jet flung and leered above her grey head, and the flames of the fire reached up in a hungry attempt to devour the two swoops of red plush with which the mantelshelf was draped.

Outside, a wonderful ultramarine sky was taut above the tree-tops, and buttoned up with nacreous stars, and chimes from church steeples swung dolorously out like little lads falling, with cries, from apple trees.

The old woman drank cup after cup of strong tea, and finally laid down the book with a gusty sigh.

"Och, if only me conscience didn't whinge so of a Sunday night," she muttered. "It'll be the bells that set it goin', an' they callin' up the people into the blessed House of the Lord."

She scratched her head with a bodkin that leaned handily out of a vase in a niche, and fell to biting her nails again, stretching out her lean old shanks to the roaring fire.

"The dear knows," she continued, "I'm lonely . . . Not for the folk that do be pratin' an' preachin', an' turnin' the world upside down, but it's a loneliness that's inside of me, an' cries an' cries an' won't stay its clamourin'."

She rose suddenly and went to the window.

"It's a bewitched sort of night," commented the old woman, feeling the mystery of it. From the bow-window of her little house in the Dublin suburbs, she could see the slender lamp-posts leaning crazily towards the garden-fences, gleaming green; the leaves flying off the tall trees in the autumn wind like aeroplanes; people crunching over the drifts; and the high stars beaming above all. From the luminous firmament, her eyes travelled down to the pavement bizarrely patterned with gas-light and the shadows of the shifting boughs.

"A fine night so, to have fallen on the bad world," the old woman said, turning back to the fireside. She picked up the novel again, and had wandered through a paragraph or two when there

came a quick and determined knocking at her door.

"Praise be to God an' who's comin' visitin' me now?" she ejaculated, rising to admit her caller.

When she opened the door, the wind blew in a channel of bronze leaves and a saint in a swirling white gown with lavender-coloured sandals that were not adequate to keep in check his large and knobbly old toes.

With an ugly crash the wind pulled the door out of the old woman's hand, and she stood staring at her strange visitor.

"Don't be afraid," said the old saint, "but lead me into your pleasant parlour. Faith, it's a long journey through the black night into the saffron morning. How the wind blows! It has a savage tooth. May I bide by your fire a wee while, woman of the house?"

"But . . . but," stammered the old woman, retreating slowly back into the parlour, "I haven't the know yet of who your honour may be."

"A saint of the Lord," he answered. "But not one of the big ones, canonized, and bedazened with blessings; just a mild an' a small one. Don't be terrified. Let us draw our chairs to the fire, an' continue with your tea-drinkin'; it's a refreshin' beverage —at least, I always found it so during my time on earth."

"I had a sister who saw the devil once," said the old woman, crossing herself, and looking fearfully at her guest; "an' himself in the shape of a collie-dog. If 'tis the devil ye are come to plague me, take yourself off in the holy name of Christ."

But the saint did not move and, looking, the old woman saw a halo, like a circlet of gold wire, resting above his hoary head, and shining as gold never did. She sank back into a chair, resorting to the old comforting habit of biting her nails.

"Nay, there's nothing to be afraid of," said the saint. He sat down, settling his gown about him and waggling his toes before the fire. "A great lot of books ye have," he commented friendlily, looking round the room. "But I don't see the Bible."

"I haven't one," said the old woman, "it moithers me to read it."

"Ah, but it's a sweet work," remarked the saint, "an' comely the readin'. It needn't fret anyone to read those pages. An' how's things with yourself?" he went on brightly. "Ye look glum enough to have lost seven kingdoms."

"Maybe I'm feelin' me age an' folly," answered the old woman shakily. "An' what is a saint like yourself, so old and holy, doin' down in this callous world?"

"I'm here on God's mission," said the saint.

"God's mission, is it?" said the old woman softly. She

sighed, and swallowed a mouthful of tea. "It's p'r'aps God I'm weary for," she continued; "it's a bitter thing to be old, to come to the end an' not to hear His voice."

"Ye've only to call Him," observed the saint. "That's a cry that would be heard from the depths of the sea—from the fastness of the mightiest hill—from the ends of the earth."

"Ah, but He wouldn't want to hear from me," said the old woman miserably.

"Have ye ever asked Him?" put in the saint.

"Nay. I have not. I've been afraid to trouble Him."

"Sure," said the saint mildly, "it's a pleasure for Himself to hear a voice shoutin' up from this world. You try it, old dear. It's a fine an' comfortin' call ye'll get back."

"Even after what I've done?"

"In spite of all."

"But I'm killed when I think of what I've been up to."

"Ah, come now; nothin's so bad that it won't bear the tellin' some time or another," said the saint. "Let's hear your tale. Don't be shy. I've shut my eyes an' I'm not lookin' at ye at all."

The old woman swallowed nervously, stammered, and halted, choked, wept. Suddenly she began in an assured voice:

"'Twas this way, your honour—an' I hope God an' yourself will both forgive me; it was all in the merry days that are gone. Says God in me ear: 'Ye can have anythin' within reason in this world.' 'That makes kind hearin',' says I, in me arrogance, 'but, faith, who wants anythin' within reason?' Well, He gave me a good an' a steady husband who had a grand job in Connolly's office, an' everythin' was fine an' soft till about ten years after the weddin'. Then a young feller began to come round with a cart of cucumbers, turnips an' the like. He used to drive into this street, stop outside this very house, an' shout out the wares of him. A bold article he was—not very big in build, but he had a sunny face, an' a tongue that would have kindled enthusiasm in a stone. He'd wandered all round the world, like the Jews, an' I never heard the like of his conversation. I used to buy all the vegetables we wanted from him, an' from passin' the time of day an' common chat we got to talkin' about the ways of men an' women, an' Nature, till one day he let on to me that he loved me, and how did I feel about himself.

"'Isn't it a queer thing you should be confusin' me so?' I says to him, 'an' meself married an' happy an' all.'

"I don't know; it's a pity I didn't keep to that tale, or went elsewhere to live or buy me vegetables. Anyway, he moithered an' wheedled, an' kept on stirrin' me up till more than kissin' was

passin' between us. Och, he got into me head like a swirl of music. Women are often offered that sort of music, an' it's the bad ones that listen an' play an answerin' tune!

"'Twas a terrible thing, terrible. I stopped goin' to church—me husband fell ill—died. Yes, that happened too, an' all at once this young feller disappeared. I've never seen him to this day, an' lived alone, an' had plenty of time for broodin' an' regrettin', an' wishin' to get back to the peace that was with me long an' long ago, but 'tis feared I am to talk to the Lord about it, an' seemin' I shall never come out of the dark now."

"Take it easy," said the saint. "We're all sinners on earth—even the saints. Think o' some of 'em that started off as pagans, an' then became fervent Christians."

"I do, to be sure," replied the old woman sadly. "But, faith, they're not much comfort to me, roaring heathens an' all."

"Well, you mustn't despair," said the old saint, rising. "Keep calm an' say your prayers. Go to church sometimes, too, an' ye'll see how easy it'll all be—no shoutin' an' reproachin'—nothin' but gladness an' cheer that ye've come back. There's many a one sittin' at the throne of God this minute, that on earth did far greater harm than yourself."

"Is that so?" asked the old woman, brightening.

"It's the truth I'm tellin' ye," replied the saint. "Where would be the advantage in deceivin' a dacent old body like yourself? Now, I must leave ye, an' thanks for your hospitality. Don't forget—it's always darkest before the dawn, an' you take a little trip to church, before it's too late."

"Ay, I'll go," said the old woman. "Sure, since I've talked to ye, nothin' seems so desperate now. I bless the night that sent ye. I heard tell the saints only visited the good, an' then on State occasions an' bonfire nights, but seemin' I've been wrongly informed. Ye've more than cheered me."

The saint went to the door.

"I'll see meself off," he said. "Good night, good creature."

He was out of the room, save for the heels of his sandals, when he suddenly darted back.

"One thing before I go—for your ear only," said he, "an' take comfort from it—*I* was the man who came round to ye in the long ago sellin' the vegetables."

* * *

All men and women are liars, with one striking difference between them: women are successful.

E. TEMPLE THURSTON

THE FALL

"So remarkably silent," said the viscount. "You would hardly know it was going, would you?"

by MARGARET BONHAM

IN nineteen forty-seven Lord Trendillock started on his autobiography. It meant writing about himself for four hours a day and talking about what he had written for another six, and so he got a prodigious amount of enjoyment out of it. He asked himself constantly why he had not thought of tasting these pleasures before, instead of waiting till he was sixty-eight years old to begin on them. He wrote easily, without sweat or conflict; his mind was clear and his memory good, he had a natural ability for finding the right word, and his infancy and childhood flowed from his pen as smoothly as a river in high summer.

Sometimes he stopped to ask himself if this and that had really happened to him at the age of four or five, if he had disinterred it from his memory or created it from his imagination; sixty years and more is a long time; he was seldom quite sure. He had never been much troubled by conscience, and if it seemed to him a pleasing or characteristic incident, fictitious or not, he put it in just the same.

A methodical nobleman, he wrote from eight till ten in the mornings and from nine to eleven at night. He talked about what he had written, and what he was going to write, to his wife for four hours (one for each meal), and to his friend George Harberford for two hours while they strolled in St. James's Park in the afternoons or drove in Lord Trendillock's vast car if the weather was unfavourable for walking. Since every writer knows that holding forth on one's work to someone else is just as important and clarifying as the labour of putting it down on paper, he was doing a seventy-hour week's work on himself, which, if one must do a seventy-hour week at all, is at any rate the subject most likely to hold the attention.

The rest of his time was taken up by instructing his secretary how to deal with his affairs while he was busy writing. He wrote in longhand in a child's exercise book with blue paper covers, using a gold fountain-pen; beside his elbow lay a pile of eleven identical exercise books, waiting their turn on the Hepplewhite bureau. In front of him the windows were open on the square, and pigeons

clapped their wings among the tops of the plane trees, level with his eyes. Dusty late summer turned to damp autumn, nine exercise books waited by his elbow, the leaves winnowed down from the trees; Lord Trendillock had reached his fourteenth year.

There are people who say they remember their childhood clearly but their adolescence with difficulty, seeing it misted over, like a view through a breathed-on pane. Lord Trendillock was not one of them.

His recollections of himself between the ages of fourteen and twenty were lucid and complete, and this made them, paradoxically, more difficult to write. Whereas in dealing with his early youth his pen had glided from line to line and from page to page almost of its own accord, now he would pause and sit for ten minutes or more at a time, pulling at his greenish-white moustache and staring through his gold-rimmed pince-nez out of the window at the pigeons. He had reached in his autobiography the point at which he became himself, emerged from the haze of childhood a person quite different from any other person alive or dead; fact and fantasy were now no longer indistinguishable one from the other. Punctuating his work with stares and pauses, Lord Trendillock wrote at diminishing speed the story of his life from his fourteenth to his eighteenth birthday, and there he stuck.

It was an undignified episode. He looked back on it with misgiving, and he could not make up his mind whether it should be included or not. The pigeons clapped their wings, the leaves blew spiralling down from the trees, rain brushed the glass; he sucked the end of his gold pen, and tried to watch critically and dispassionately while the whole affair, like a film, unwound itself before his mind's eye.

As it was autumn now, so it was then. The leaves blew down from the trees to the turf where the deer moved in the park, to the shoulders of the sad marble nymphs on the terrace, to the surface of the lake. Trendillock lay outside the lodge gates, and through them the villagers had a distant but uninterrupted view of the vast house, with (as if that were not enough) another reflected upside down in the water. It was built of cold pale grey granite, in which flecks of light glittered; when the sun shone it looked at the same time solid and almost transparent.

There were three houses and twelve cottages in the village, an inn and a church. Most of them stood on two sides of a triangular green, with the lodge gates on the third and a duck pond in the middle. The nearest railway was fourteen miles distant. At the end of the nineteenth century the village was almost as feudal-minded as it had been six hundred years before. None of its

inhabitants, with a single exception, could be said to know what the word progress meant.

On an autumn afternoon in eighteen ninety-seven, a damp water-clear day when the house and its reflection looked like a steel engraving, this exception was working in a yard beside one of the cottages on the green. He had been in the same spot, engaged in the same occupation, for so long that the villagers passing and repassing the low fence hardly turned their heads to stare at what he was doing. The boy took no notice of them, beyond calling good day over his shoulder when they spoke.

From well up the drive, through the open iron gates between the lodges, the viscount saw him in the distance. "Mad Arthur," he said. "Look here, Sophia, Arthur the Demon Blacksmith." His grey horse pranced; beside him, more sedately, Miss Sophia Gibbon rode a chestnut mare, and behind them trotted a groom. Miss Gibbon looked obliquely at the viscount, but made no answer. Someone rushed out with feudal enthusiasm and curtsied by the open gates, and across the green went the riders, skirting the duck pond, advancing on the cottage.

The door was open, wreathed with whiskery jasmin, and at their approach scuffling noises sounded from within. The viscount dismounted, handed the reins to the groom in exchange for a basket, and carried the latter up the path. He was only eighteen, but he had to duck his head when he went through the door into the interior gloom; dusky white aprons and pinafores bobbed, and then he disappeared.

Though he must have heard them coming, the boy went on working, bent over the machine. Miss Gibbon, with a sideways glance at the cottage, got off her horse too and went through the sagging gate and into the yard. Her eyes were long and greenish, and made for sidelong looks, which she used less consciously than with a kind of instinct. In eighteen ninety-seven they thought her mouth was too large, and at seventeen she was beginning to realise it; when she remembered she drew it together and pulled in the corners. But with Arthur she did not bother.

Standing beside him in a dark-green riding habit and a hat with a feather curling from the brim towards her cheek, she unleashed it in a tremendous smile. Under the hat was a great load of darkish hair, looped and plaited, but neither curled nor very glossy. Miss Gibbon was not a beauty, but she had unlimited magnetism and was a baronet's daughter; this was why she was more or less engaged to the viscount.

"Is it nearly finished?" she asked Arthur.

From the cottage behind her she heard someone opening with difficulty a window that was always kept closed. The viscount

had asked for a little ventilation, not because he was too hot, but in order to hear what they were saying. Sophia knew that if she turned her head she would see his face in the jasmin-wreathed gloom, and hovering behind it the face of Arthur's mother, who had just had her eleventh baby and was being consoled (or congratulated, it depended which way you looked at it) with a basket of things from the House. Sophia also knew that in there, consoling or congratulating Arthur's mother, who was now up and about after four days in bed, was where she ought to be too. "Will it go yet ?" she said, and kept her back to the cottage.

Arthur straightened up. His pinkish-red hair was threaded with iridescent black beads of oil ; he wore an oily shirt with the sleeves rolled right up, and a pair of very tight and dirty and expensive tweed knickerbockers that might once have been the viscount's. The skin of his face and neck and forearms was brown and freckled, but that of his upper arms and chest was milky white, almost luminous, and grown with hairs like fine copper wires.

"She's done," he said. "She's ready now." The corrected pronoun was a reproof.

Inclining forward, Sophia let her eyes wander with an awed expression over Arthur's creation—that anyone could have designed and put together from pieces of cold metal this complicated machine was beyond her understanding, let alone that it should be capable of moving. The body was the corpse of an old horse-carriage, and had kept its buttoned leather seats. Through its floor, vertically, rose a column crowned horizontally with an uncommonly large wheel, scarred round its circumference, but still, though knobless, somehow nautical. Behind, below and in front of the body, the engine was so very visible ; the bonnet confined it half-heartedly, it escaped and stuck out mechanical elbows and ends in all directions.

"But will she really move ?" said Sophia. Unlike the viscount, she did not think Arthur funny. She was impressed.

"I'll try her out," said Arthur.

"Now ?"

"No time like now," said Arthur. "Likely you won't believe me if I don't, nor no one else neither. She goes, you'll see."

"Oh, I do believe you, Arthur, I promise you I do. Can I sit in it beside you ? I should so like to ride in it. In her, that is."

The viscount's elbow was on the parlour window-sill, among the ferns. He had set Arthur's mother off on a monologue about machines cluttering up the yard and wasting people's time, and this gave him an excuse to look out and listen, with the other ear shut, to what Arthur and Sophia were saying. His eyes were half-closed and his face appeared sleepy and scornful, but inwardly he was raging at Sophia.

Once he lashed his riding-crop, but in a small controlled way, at the tip of an aspidistra leaf, as if he were practising before Arthur came within range. He watched Sophia lean forward again, appealing to Arthur. (Fifty years later Lord Trendillock could see it so clearly, the sway of her waist towards the machine's ungainly wheel; it was one of the moments he best remembered, but why he did not know.)

"Can I?" she said.

Arthur jerked his head slightly towards the cottage, and said, "Better not."

"Please do let me, Arthur."

"'Tis all dirty," said Arthur, giving way with an almost audible creak.

The viscount's elbow disappeared rather suddenly from the window-sill. Arthur's mother had not liked to sit down and she was tired of standing—her curtsy was unbalanced and she levered herself up on the edge of the table, making the plush fringe dance. The viscount went outside; drowsy, contemptuous, but summoning a faint lord of the manor nod for Arthur, he strolled up to them. Over their heads soared the chestnut tree beside the cottage, its thinning leaves sulphur-yellow against the grey sky. One of them was pasted like a jaundiced hand on the machine's seat. Arthur walked round complacently and picked it off, to show he was not afraid of the viscount.

"Oh, Francis," said Sophia, turning on him a different smile from the one she bestowed on Arthur, "it goes now. I am to ride in it, and you must watch."

The viscount looked amused, superior and sceptical, but made no answer. He leaned against the gatepost and swung the crop from his finger, to and fro, like a pendulum. To and fro between him and Arthur moved Sophia's sidelong glance. Arthur opened the gate and lifted away a piece of the fence; the yard sloped gently out on to the green. He climbed up to the seat and used both hands and his bulging arm muscles to release the brake, and through the gap, majestically slowly and with no sound but a rhythmic squeal, his horseless carriage rolled out on to the cropped grass. Showing off a little, Arthur steered it at the duck pond and swerved aside before it stopped. He got out and bent over it, and began to wind a length of sashcord round a kind of reel.

"So remarkably silent," said the viscount. "You would hardly know it was going, would you? Except, of course, that it moves."

He mounted his grey horse; towering sublimely above Arthur and the machine, knowing that a man on a horse is a superman on a pedestal, he smiled blandly down on them. Sophia had followed on foot and stood beside Arthur. She watched the sashcord-

winding admiringly, flicked a stubborn glance upward at the viscount. Encouraged into affectation, the grey horse pranced.

"Does it go uphill too?" said the viscount.

Arthur made an affirmative noise, bending down to peer at its underbelly.

"So silently? But how many men have to push?"

"The engine isn't going," said Sophia. "Arthur is winding it up, I should have thought any one could see that. Nobody has to push. It will go very fast, you'll see, Francis."

"Does it go very fast, Arthur?"

"I don't know," said Arthur from underneath. "I reckon she oughter do ten miles an hour."

"Ten—miles—an—hour," said the viscount. "If the wind is strong and the slope is steep down perhaps even eleven, don't you think? But will it hold together at that speed?"

"'Tis fastened strong," said Arthur, not at all annoyed.

"But if you'll forgive me for saying so, Arthur—not as strongly as this," said the viscount, and slapped the haunches of his horse.

"You don't know till you see it go, do you, Francis?" said Sophia; "and anyway Arthur did make it all himself. You couldn't have made a horse."

The viscount opened his eyes a little wider, and pulled the reins tight. To Arthur he still appeared no more than maliciously amused, but Sophia saw he was furious.

"That's right," said Arthur with outrageous smugness, making things a great deal worse. The grey horse showed off, sidling and dancing beside the car. Half a dozen villagers had drifted into a group on the edge of the green, at a respectful distance.

"Tell me, Arthur," said the viscount, "what are you going to do with this thing—this contraption?"

"Why," said Arthur, "when I've got her just right, why, I'll sell her, that's what."

"Sell her? *Sell* it? Oh, there are cranks about, I don't doubt it, but really, Arthur—are they as mad as all that?"

"I reckon they are," said Arthur, placidly confident. "I reckon I know a tuthree that'd buy her, people that wants something new, like."

"Suppose someone did, Arthur, some imbecile; would it be indiscreet to ask what you would do with the money?"

"Why, I'd make a better one. 'Twould pay to get the parts turned proper, see."

"To keep for yourself?"

"What do I want with 'em?" said Arthur derisively. "Come I made a better one, 'twould sell for more money."

"And then what?"

"Why, then I'll make a better one still, see."

"But by then you may be too old to work, don't you think?" said the viscount.

"Oh, 'tis the first one takes the time," said Arthur. "Come I get some money and have the parts made I can turn 'em out one in three months or less, the more money the quicker, you'll see. This 'un's just the start."

"Oh, Arthur," said Sophia, "you must be very clever."

The viscount, his eyes nearly shut, sat quite still on his horse. He looked down his nose at them, at Arthur standing beside the machine, at Arthur's hand splayed on the carriage seat's back, broken-nailed, square, streaked with oil; at Sophia in her clean dark-green habit standing obstinately beside Arthur; at the hideous naked parts of the engine, oily, metallic, clumsily beaten out of pieces salvaged from scrapheaps. His lip curled, thought Sophia, who liked to read the works of lady novelists. She said to Arthur, with an oblique look, "Shall I get in now? Is she ready to go?"

"Near enough," said Arthur. He frowned in concentration at the end of the sashcord, which he held in his hand. Sophia hitched up her riding habit and clambered into the seat, realising, with faint surprise, that it was rather pleasant not to be helped along by a gentlemanly hand holding her elbow or clasping her fingers. It gave her a feeling of freedom and progress. She sat up very straight and flashed at the viscount a sideways glance of malice, defiance and complacency.

"Sophia," said the viscount in a private voice, ignoring Arthur who was anyway lost in a trance, "everyone is looking. Think twice before you make yourself a laughing-stock in front of the whole village."

"Thank you; I have," said Sophia. "Twice at least. People always laugh at pioneers, don't they? Goodbye, Francis—I don't suppose we shall go far."

"I don't suppose so, either," said the viscount. "Very well." He was openly angry at last; his nostrils were white, his hands shook with rage. Across Sophia and the motor Arthur looked at him, and opened his mouth to speak, but seemed to think better of it. Instead he braced his arm muscles and pulled the sashcord.

There was a prodigious explosion of sound; the machine rocked like a touched-off cannon, roared and popped, vomited great billows of bluish smoke. From the duck pond into which his horse had flung him, through the mud that plastered his features and clotted on his lashes, the viscount saw Arthur and Sophia, sitting stiffly upright side by side, grinding and jerking away in slow motion across the green. They did not look back. The set of their shoulders, the rigidity of their heads, told him they had seen

his fall. Between the lodge gates and up the distant drive shot a whitish blur: that was his horse.

Lord Trendillock ran his hand over his face, replaced his pince-nez, went on staring out of the window. It had been almost exactly half a century ago, and he could see it as clearly as he saw the pigeons in the trees. He had behaved very badly; the more he thought of it the more reprehensible it seemed, the more undignified and childish and yet the more important as one of the turning-points of his life. If he left it out, his autobiography would be incomplete; if he put it in, he must write the truth. The clock on his desk said four minutes to ten. For once he allowed himself to stop early. He went downstairs to look for his wife, who was writing letters, and asked her what she thought he should do.

"I think you should write it," she said.

"Do you, Sophia?" said Lord Trendillock. "It was a shocking affair, wasn't it?"

"Well, I behaved badly too, I know, but it wasn't really your fault. Undignified it may have been, but you know it's important. If it hadn't happened I should probably have married Francis, and he might not have gone to the Boer War and been killed; and frankly, you wouldn't have become an automobile king without me to prod you on. Francis had no heirs, you can't hurt any one. I think you should put it in."

"I suppose I'd better," said Lord Trendillock. "Sophia—even the part about knowing he'd go in the duck pond and not saying anything?"

"People like to be told you're human," said Sophia. "They don't believe it, but they like to be told. Yes, Arthur; even that."

* * *

OPEN SESAME

The story is told in London of a doctor who wrote out a prescription of the average doctor's legibility.

The patient used it for two years as a railway pass. Twice it got him into the Albert Hall, and once even into the Royal Enclosure.

It came in handy as a letter from his employer to the cashier, so that he received a handsome rise in salary. And finally, his daughter played it on the piano at an Institute of Music and came away with the first scholarship on the year's list.

THE CAT AND THE COBRA

Of course you may say it was a put-up job!

by A. W. SMITH

A FIVE-FOOT cobra is a big one. A six-footer may exist. A seven-footer is unheard of. This, of course, applies to the common cobra. The hamadryad, or King Cobra, is known to exceed twelve feet in length. He is really dangerous because he will attack at sight. The common cobra will not. If he can he slips quietly away unless he thinks he is cornered. Then you will hear what is to nearly all human beings one of the most frightening sounds on earth—the hiss of an angry snake.

The inhuman "aah," low and throaty, of an angry mob, the drawn "wheeow" of an approaching shell—these sounds are bad enough. But for real blood-freezing paralysis go into a dark bathroom and hear the sudden explosive hiss from the wet cement floor.

Perhaps it came from behind the tin bathtub . . . or from the corner under the window . . .

Stand still—stand very still.

You thought you heard the dry whisper of coils across the floor? The great earthenware *chatti* in the corner sweating cold water from its porous sides does not sweat as coldly as you. It could not stand more still.

The chink from the door ajar throws a shaft of friendly yellow light on the wet, shining floor. Faiz Ullah moving discreetly, laying out shirt (click go studs into shirtfront)—wonders what it is that keeps master . . .

Acutely conscious of bare ankles. Hair lifting on scalp, prickling the skin. Move softly—very softly. Take the big bath towel—oh, very gently. Hold it loosely, making a curtain in front of your shins, so—

Back out . . . gently, I said. No king deserves more reverence . . . And don't cry out. As you value your life, don't cry out.

Wheew—

Once again in the warm yellow light of your room with bathroom door slammed shut, feel brave again. Send Faiz Ullah flying for something long and strong, light and whippy. A cut down polo stick, for instance—that is the best—

Ai, Faiz Ullah—polo lakri lao—

Shout and shout—send them running.

Slip feet into riding boots. Powder them first if feet are bare. You'll be late for dinner taking them off if you don't.

Ai, durwan ! Hurricane lamp lao—

Wrapped discreetly in a heavy blanket, approach with caution—electric torch and stick of whippy cane in hand.

Butler, sweeper, *durwan*, *bhisti*, and the *bhisti's* son hang whispering at the verandah door.

Hold the dog, Faiz Ullah—

Fling wide the door, strike hard, cut just below the spectacles on the swaying swollen sac of the hood.

They will throw him out to the kites and crows, but not before the sweeper has removed the head in order to collect the Government reward.

" Sorry I'm late. I killed a cobra in my bathroom—eight feet at least." You may be nonchalant now over gin and bitters.

" More gin ? "—" Thanks "—" No ice came up on the mail train "—" Sorry."

India is not all cobras, as some people think, but they are common enough—even in Calcutta. As a business we used to occupy one of those gloomy fortresses of finance off Clive Street. It was an ancient semi-classical affair of Corinthian columns and deep verandahs. The outside was stucco which grew a green mossy beard every rains. The inside was dark and cool with high ceilings and creaking floors. It was so unpretentious and old-fashioned that only a firm of our respectability and reputation could have risked its credit by occupying it.

Not one of us would ever think of changing. We took great pride in our building—it had been ours for a hundred years—and we professed to look down on those who occupied the newly risen steel and concrete buildings which are so popular and cost so much.

The building was Jones' domain. As head accountant he was responsible, among other things, for its organization and upkeep, for the hiring and firing of the subordinate staff and for generally making the way smooth for those of us who were solely concerned with making profits. Jones, of course, had no more high office than to see that our actions were properly recorded in terms of *rupees* and *annas* and *pice*. His role was more or less automatic, in so far as anything can be said to be automatic in India.

He was doubtless a good accountant, but he lacked above all things that sweet nature and supreme tact which is necessary for the easy handling of an Indian staff. He bewildered them. He tried to alter age-old customs. In doing so he was always stubbing his

toe. He might as well have tried to change the multiplication table.

Instead of accepting the order of things painstakingly built up on a web of belief and precedent, he tried to treat everyone as a rational human being. From the head clerk down to the humblest sweeper, he thought they could be persuaded by the validity of argument. With dogmatic thoroughness he tried to explain that so and so was a better, a shorter, a quicker and a less laborious way of doing things—in short, that it was more efficient.

He was met with charming indulgent smiles and ready acquiescence—and nothing was done about it.

Moreover, he lacked understanding. He couldn't see why Rajah Singh, the sepoy, must never be asked to touch a glass of water, or why the waterman must never be told to carry a pair of shoes to be mended, or quite why Shauqat Ali, one of the piece-goods bazaar clerks, wouldn't move a plate of ham sandwiches.

All these things merely caused Jones to lose his temper, which didn't do a bit of good. By degrees he learned better, although it was a slow process. There was always something to send Jones into a fit of inarticulate rage. For instance, one day he took it into his head to go over the pay sheet. He checked it with a blue pencil, name by name, all the way from Ahmed Ali, Chittagonian driver of the office car, past the Bannerjis and Mukerjis, down to Xavier and Zachariah, the Indian Christian wharf clerks. At the very bottom of the pay roll Jones discovered—"Cats two—one *rupee* each."

He hammered his bell. The cashier was quite undisturbed.

"And why not—?" he asked in effect. Ever since Wilson Sahib's time there had always been two cats on the pay roll. First there had been only one and then two.

Now Wilson Sahib had retired somewhere back in the early nineties. Jones had met him in London—an elderly man in the middle eighties.

"But why—?" Jones almost frothed at the mouth.

"For forty years two *rupees* a month—nearly a thousand *rupees* on cats."

"It was the Sahib's order," purred the cashier.

Jones instituted an inquiry into the status of the office cats.

"I will make immediate inquisition," said the cashier.

"Not emolument for cats two, your honour," said the cashier later, "but subsistence allowance at *rupees* one *per mensem per capita*. How can cat get the salary, notwithstanding?"

He smiled gently at the whimsy. Jones found his smile particularly infuriating.

"I don't believe there are any cats," he said resentfully. "It's

just another ramp. It simply means that the sweeper or someone gets two *rupees* a month extra because someone was fool enough—"

"Wilson Sahib's order, your honour," said the cashier reprovingly, "but I will bring—"

In due course he brought—two meagre grey cats who struggled in the arms of the head sweeper and his assistant and swore volubly when Jones was rash enough to put out a hand.

The head sweeper said something which Jones could not understand. Jones never bothered to learn any language but his own.

"That is senior cat—ten years' service, your honour," translated the cashier. "Sweeper say please he must have more subsistence. The old age draws on it and cat must get milk, the bowls one *per diem*."

"Oh, shut up," said Jones. "I'm going to sack both. We can't have cats, of all things, on the pay roll—what with economy and jute prices and everything ."

"But Wilson Sahib's order," protested the cashier, who could not connect jute with cats.

"Blow Wilson Sahib," said Jones.

With a lordly sweep of his blue pencil he struck the cats, two, senior and junior, from the pay roll.

Our building was old. It dated back to the eighteen-twenties, to the palmy days of indigo and opium, when a fortune might be turned on a cargo. Into it poured rats like a plague of Egypt. They scuttered along the partition tops and reeved their noses at us from the dusk of corners. There were great grey-scarred veterans who seemed to prefer a simple diet of paper and electric-light cords to the fat living of the docks and sewers. There were little brown tiddlers who nested in the cotton and jute samples.

We complained one at a time and all together, but on the subject of cats Jones was adamant.

"Ridiculous," he said. "Two *rupees* a month for cats—I ask you—"

He spent untold gold on traps and poisons. He bought parched corn for bait by the sack load—enough to feed not only the whole corps of sweepers but the waterman also and the waterman's son, the driver of the office car and the man who sold betel nuts and pan leaves at the bottom of the stairs. There were queer smells in dark cupboards—rotten cheesy fish smells.

"Jones Sahib," explained the sepoys with a knowing leer.

But to all the wiles of Jones the rats seemed to prefer the great calfskin ledgers which it took two strong men to lift.

It was too much. Every plague of over-population is followed by its natural antidote.

A sepoy was sent down the rickety stairs to the jute sample room. He was a portly and dignified figure in his smart blue uniform and scarlet *pugri*. He did not hurry, nor yet did he dawdle. He descended with measured stride, head up, well-brushed beard fluffed up to his ears.

He came up the stairs again in headlong flight. He had seen a fine cobra, he gibbered, playing with its tail at the bottom of the stairs. He positively refused to go down again.

"*Nag*—" the word spread round the office like wildfire. The little clerks at their desks looked suspiciously at the floor. They hitched their bare toes more securely round the legs of their stools.

"Oh, yes—a cobra—" said the head sweeper cheerfully. "He guards the stairs—ever since the cats went. We sweeper folk don't use the stairs any more. I've seen it many times. It's so long—"

He indicated a strip of floor about fifteen or twenty feet long.

"Nonsense," said Jones, who was busy investigating the claims of a new kind of poison. "A cobra in the middle of Calcutta? Nonsense."

It did look odd with the tramcars clanging in the street and a row of taxis on the opposite corner.

"Nonsense," said Jones firmly.

But where there are rats there will be cobras, fulfilling the law of supply and demand. The office staff definitely refused to go up and down those stairs. They were perfectly good-natured about it and no amount of bullying by Jones made the least difference. To get at the samples we had to send a man all the way round by the street and in at the back door. It was a tedious process, but we accepted it, as one does in India, until the senior partner . . . He sent for Jones.

"What's all this," he said, "about the office being full of cobras?"

"Oh, nothing," said Jones a little uneasily. "Just a yarn."

"Well, everybody's complaining. You'd better do something about them—catch them or get the men to work properly—I don't care which. That's what you're here for."

Jones sent for the cashier.

"Kill it?" said the cashier in horror. "But, your honour—" he lowered his voice to a whisper—"the snake is holy—Our Lord Krishna, your honour."

"Well, get rid of it," said Jones testily.

"As your honour wills," said the cashier. "I have a friend in Kuccha Bazaar who is a very holy man. A snake catcher. For two *rupees* the cash money he will catch—"

" Fetch him," rapped Jones.

Jones found most of the office staff gathered at the foot of the stairs. There was hardly one among them who did not believe that when a man died without an heir his soul returned in the form of a cobra. Didn't everyone know the supreme importance of getting himself a son ? Aren't cobras holy ? Well then—

There was an air of tension. Everyone felt that something exciting was going to happen. No one knew quite what. In the hot dusty dark among the packing cases and the pillars supporting the building it was pleasantly mysterious.

" Haven't any of you people got any work to do ? " snapped Jones. " Go away—*Jao*—"

There was a shifting of feet, a shuffling of faces, a pretence of obeying the order. No one actually went. Jones decided to ignore his audience.

There was a ripple in the crowd and a little sigh went up.

" Are you the snake catcher ? "asked Jones.

The newcomer walked past Jones as if he hadn't seen him. He settled himself comfortably on his heels and lighted a green *bidi*. He sucked in the evil-smelling smoke through cupped hands and coughed.

It wasn't the snake catcher—only someone from outside who had heard that there was free entertainment to be had.

The crowd squatted on its heels, chatting. The show was free. Who knew but that it mightn't be surprising.

Jones grew impatient.

" He comes, your honour," murmured the cashier soothingly. " He sees if the hour is auspicious."

Upstairs all work seemed to be over for the day.

" He comes," said someone. A hush fell. The silence was broken by the sudden outcry of the small son of a friend of the head sweeper. Dressed up in a round embroidered cap and a heart-shaped silver amulet, he had been brought to see the show. He bellowed, rubbing his small fists in his eyes.

" *Aiee—bawa sahib—durro mut—durro mut*—Hush thee, princeling, don't fear—" said the father, looking round proudly, hoping that everyone had seen his son and heir. " See the fat sahib perched on the railing. Soon he will blow fire from his lips and smoke and serpents will come forth."

" *Chup tu.* Shut up you," said the cashier rudely from a safe and lordly eminence on top of a packing case.

" *Ai, babuji,*" said the head sweeper. " Oh, come, sir clerk—the fat sahib lacks understanding, and it is but speech to a child."

Jones found the big black eyes of the infant fastened on him. Their earnestness embarrassed him. He stamped the floor impatiently.

Again quiet. The snake catcher, with due regard for the effect of his entrance, came slowly down the stairs, step by step.

He made a deep salaam. Jones replied with an indeterminate kind of salute, rather an awkward gesture which was supposed to be one of condescension.

"*Salaam, huzoor*," said the snake catcher.

"Good morning," said Jones. "It's a fine day, isn't it?"

When this remark had been translated by the cashier the snake catcher had no hesitation in agreeing. The fact was sufficiently evident.

"Why does the fat sahib say that the sun shines?" piped the small son of the head sweeper's friend.

"It is the way of sahibs," said the head sweeper heavily. "As we say '*Ram Ram*'—so they say 'the day has well-dawned.' They find it auspicious no matter whether it is hot or wet or cold."

"Let's get on with it—" commanded Jones briskly.

"First, your honour," said the cashier, "first he do the *puja*. He very holy man. He must have money."

The crowd craned its necks as a silver *rupee* was handed over. This looked like big business. Money was being spent like water for their entertainment. Their whispering ceased as the snake catcher, seated crosslegged on the stone floor, erected copper coins and some pan leaves in a little pile before him. He drew diagrams, triangles and circles in the dust with a bit of iron. The point grated on the stone.

"That stick," whispered the cashier, "that iron stick very holy."

To Jones it looked like a simple piece of jute baling, but he hesitated to say so. The cashier wriggled his bare toes apprehensively.

With a quick movement the holy man rose to his feet pointing dramatically with his rusty iron at a crevice in a dim corner under the stairs. Certain of his audience, he walked across the floor. He began to probe between the blocks of stone. The crowd sighed a deep "Aah—." Even Jones was a little impressed.

The holy stick was doing its work. Immediately there issued from the crevice a loud and angry hiss. It sent the watching crowd pressing back into the dusky recesses of the basement. Jones felt the hair rise on the back of his neck. He shared in common with the rest a general distrust of snakes. He wondered whether it would be dignified to retire a step or two up the stairs.

He hardly had time to think. Quick as light a fine five-foot

cobra launched itself like a whiplash across the smooth stone floor. Quick as light—but quicker still the holy snake catcher made a leap for the staircase. And the crowd found points of security on packing cases and bales of cotton.

To Jones was left the sole possession of the floor.

Somewhat bewildered the cobra coiled. It raised a hooded head, barring Jones' exit to safety up the stairs.

"Stand still, your honour, stand still," admonished the cashier.

Jones needed no warning. Horror-struck he watched the swaying head—a blunt thimble-shaped object standing out from the distended hood. He did not dare move. He squinted down his nose in a painful effort to see.

"*Lathi lao*," cried the cashier. "Bring a stick."

"*Lathi lao—maro maro*," "Bring a stick and strike, strike," echoed the crowd.

The holiness of the cobra was forgotten.

"What is the fat sahib doing?" asked the infant son of the sweeper's friend.

"See the cobra," said his father.

"Did he spit that?" asked the childish voice.

Jones stood. He was fiercely conscious of ankles and lower legs. He wondered whether, as he had heard, a pair of trousers was enough to stop the poison. And would it hurt?

Through long tense seconds they eyed each other—when, from somewhere in the dark, crept the senior cat. He was light grey, thin and moth-eaten. Ears flattened to his head, body flattened to the floor, he slid, experienced warrior that he was, with stealthy stride.

The Indian cat is not like any other cat. The hand of man is more than usually turned against him. He is about as strokeable as a porcupine, and the snake is a traditional enemy.

The senior cat crept crouching past Jones' legs. The tip of his mangy tail flicked convulsively. It was this which caught the cobra's eye. His weaving head changed its direction. It increased in speed.

Jones, white as a sheet, squinted down his nose at the senior cat.

The cobra struck. In that split second a lot of things happened. The cat leaped lightly to land over the cobra's back. And Jones—Jones displayed an agility of which those who knew him best hardly believe him capable. In one standing jump he landed about five steps up the stairs.

The son of the sweeper's friend crowed in delight, but the crowd was too intent on the senior cat's battle to notice Jones. Each time the cobra struck the senior cat jumped. To one side,

to the other side—or merely straight up in the air so that the snake shot beneath him. Each time he jumped he dealt a vicious blow with clawed forepaw.

After each attack the cobra whirled round to sit up on his coiled body, head swaying, hood extended, forked tongue flicking, and the senior cat crouched low to the floor, still but for the convulsive flicking of his tail. His growls were horrible.

Again the cobra struck with no loss of force. This time the senior cat leaped high, only to whirl around in mid-air. He dropped with all four feet extended, biting just where the head joined the spectacled hood. For a moment snake and cat lashed about the floor. The cat jumped clear. He left his enemy writhing.

For the cobra that was the end. The senior cat paraded stealthily round his victim. He waited only for a chance to close.

Jones mopped his brow. Fascinated, he watched the senior cat.

It was time now for the junior cat. With skill she sprang from behind a pillar. It was the turn, too, of Rajah Singh Sepoy, burly Rajput from the fighting races. Black beard brushed up fiercely to his ears, waving a heavy bamboo *lathi*, he leaped into the arena.

"*Hut jao, billi*—Out of the way, cat—" he cried.

"*Shabash, maro, maro*—" "Well done, lay on, lay on—" chanted the crowd.

Rajah Singh laid on. The iron shoe of his staff struck sparks from the floor. The dust flew. The cobra was dead.

The senior and junior cat faded like lean grey shadows.

Of course, you may say it was a put-up job. If the cats were there all the time . . . you see what I mean.

Possibly.

This doubtless occurred to Jones, who was always suspicious of human nature. He debated the question for a whole afternoon before signing a voucher for reinstatement of the cats and incidental expenses. To cash—holy man for finding one cobra serpent . . . *et cetera.*

Jones also sacked the head sweeper.

You see, one of his visitors during the afternoon was a dirty dishevelled gentleman who forced himself into Jones' office. He claimed to be the head sweeper's caste brother. He claimed also that he had not been paid. He demanded to be paid. He presented, in fact, a dirty bill, for one fine cobra from which the poison fangs had been removed.

* * *

Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people we personally dislike.

OSCAR WILDE, *An Ideal Husband*

UNDER THE LEAVES GREEN

I came in from the camp and you from the city . . . uncertain, apprehensive still—
having for days rehearsed, each by his own script, the play
of attitudes and words, the first tentative touch,
the implied yes
and (always) the ultimate embrace.
But as it happened : I took your hand to cross the street,
and our fingers held . . . the way vines do in growing,
and we were wonderfully inarticulate—
we were breathlessly afraid . . . like flying in a dream.
Then most of the afternoon we lay in the sun,
among the last late dandelions and curious foraging ants—
shuttling secret thoughts between us
and exquisite promises . . . anticipating evening.

WALTER BENTON

Nouronihar

She followed him without knowing what she did, for a thousand strange notions jostled themselves in her mind. She even passed a big clump of honeysuckle (which she greatly loved) without paying the least attention to it. Then Gulchenrouz, out of breath, sank down on the grass. Nouronihar, almost beside herself, and as much fatigued by the tumult of her thoughts as by her hurrying, flung herself down beside him, took his little icy hands to her warm bosom and soothed his brow. At last he came to life, and, burying his head in Nouronihar's robe, he begged her not to return yet to the harem . . .

Meanwhile the moon arose, and so delightful was the evening that it was decided to take supper in the open air. One of the eunuchs hurried off to look for melons, while others shook the overhanging branches which rained down showers of sweet almonds on the happy company . . . But Gulchenrouz, as usual clasped in Nouronihar's arms, closed his little red lips when Sutlememe offered him a morsel; for he would take nothing save from the hands of his cousin, and he pressed her lips like a bee which intoxicates itself with the honey from a flower.

WILLIAM BECKFORD, 1759-1844, *Vathek*

Under The Leaves Green

Who shall have my fair lady?
Who shall have my fair lady?
Who but I, who but I, who but I?
Under the leaves green!

The fairest man
That best love can,
Dandirly, dandirly, dandirly dan,
Under the leaves green!

Author Unknown

All For Love

With a view to mating, the sole end of its life, the Great Peacock moth is endowed with a marvellous prerogative. It has the power to discover the object of its desire in spite of distance, in spite of obstacles. Two or three nights are given to its search. If it cannot profit by them, all is ended. Stoically the creature withdraws into a corner and sleeps the last sleep, the end of illusions.

The Great Peacock knows nothing of food. While so many others, joyful banqueters, unrolling their spiral trunks plunge them into honeyed blossoms, this incomparable ascetic has no means of restoring its strength. The Great Peacock renounces the joys of the palate; but with them it surrenders long life.

HENRI FABRE, *Social Life in the Insect World, translated by* BERNARD MIALL

Pastoral

When I see the new flowers spring up in the meadow, when I hear the little stream murmur in the pebbles, then I am held by a new love from which I shall never recover; if this sickness is not healed, well I know that I shall die.

I am a dark and lovely and young maid, my cheek is vermilion, my eyes grey, my mouth beautiful. My little breast so pricks me that I cannot bear it; 'tis reason I meddle with the sweet pain of love.

Surely if I found one that would set me on the way, I would gladly love, never would I leave him; for I have heard it said and told for truth that none has perfect bliss until she comes to love.

Translated from a French Pastourelle of the XIIIth century, by RICHARD ALDINGTON

The Feminine Touch

" Do you really think so ? " she asked, coming close to him. " Oh ! Rodolphe, if you only knew it ! I loved you very dearly ! " She took his hand . . . and throwing herself on his breast, said : " I thought I should have died . . . whilst you . . . avoided me."

It was quite true ; he had carefully done so for the past three years. Emma, alluring as a cat in love, went on, " You are in love with other women ; tell the truth. Oh ! I understand, and I can excuse them ; I suppose you seduced them, as you seduced me . . ."

She was really fascinating to behold, with tears trembling in her eyes, like dew-drops in the calyx of a blue flower, and he drew her on to his knee, and stroked her hair. She began to sob, but Rodolphe thought it was only the expression of her love ; then, as she was still silent, he took it for the last struggle of modesty, and said : " Oh ! forgive me ! You are the only woman I care for. I have been unkind, and a fool. Tell me, what is the matter ? " He knelt down beside her.

" I am ruined, Rodolphe," she cried. " Will you lend me 3,000 francs ? "

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT, 1821-1880, *Madame Bovary*

Loved Helen

I would forgo
my snowfields for your sun,
I would surrender
crocus
and ice-gentian
and all the lilies
rising one by one . . .

I would forget
the holy marjoram
and all the little speedwells
for just one grain
of your enchantment . . .

O stay,
stay close,
bend down . . .
I would revive the whole
of Ilium
and in a sacred trance,
show Helen
who made Troy
a barren town.

H. DOLITTLE

JENNY

She wouldn't tell; he was quite sure she wouldn't tell!

by ERSKINE CALDWELL

THE water was up again. It had been raining for almost two whole days, and the creek was full to the banks. Dawn had broken grey that morning, and for the first time that week the sky was blue and warm.

Les pulled off his shirt and unbuckled his pants. Les never had to bother with underwear, because as soon as it was warm enough in the spring to go barefooted he hid his union suit in a closet and left it there until the autumn. His mother was not alive, and his father never bothered about the underclothes.

" I wish we had a shovel to dig out some of the muck," he said. " Every time it rains this hole fills up with this stuff. I'd go home and get a shovel, but if they saw me they'd make me stay there and do something."

While Les was hanging his shirt and pants on a bush, I waded out into the yellow water. The muck on the bottom was ankle deep, and there were hundreds of dead branches stuck in it. I pulled out some of the largest and threw them on the other bank out of the way.

" How's the water, Jack ? " Les asked. " How deep is it this time ? "

I waded out to the middle of the creek where the current was the strongest. The yellow water came almost up to my shoulders.

" Nearly neck deep," I said. " But there's about a million dead branches stuck in the bottom. Hurry up and help me throw them out."

Les came splashing in. The muddy water gurgled and sucked around his waist.

" I'll bet somebody comes down here every day and pitches these dead branches in here," Les said, making a face. " I don't see how else they could get here. Dead tree branches don't fall into a creek this fast. Somebody is throwing them in, and I'll bet a pretty penny he doesn't live a million miles away, either."

" Maybe Old Howes does it, Les."

" Sure, he does it. He's the one I'm talking about. I'll bet anything he comes down and throws old branches in every day."

Les stepped on a sharp piece. He held his nose and squeezed his eyes and ducked under and pulled it out.

"You know what?" Les said.

"What?"

"Old Howes told Pa we scared his cows last Saturday. He said we made them run so much he couldn't get them to let down their milk Saturday night."

"This creek bottom isn't his. Old Howes doesn't own anything down here except that pasture on the other side of the fence. We haven't even been on the other side of the fence this year, have we?"

"I haven't seen Old Howes' cows all summer. If I did see them, I wouldn't run them. He just told Pa that because he doesn't want us to come swimming in the creek."

Pieces of dead bark and curled chips suddenly came floating down the creek. Somewhere up there the dead wood had broken loose from a bough or something across the water. I held my arms V-shaped and caught the bark and chips and threw them out of the way.

Les said something, diving down to pull up a dead branch. The muck on the bottom of the creek was so deep we could not take a step without first pulling our feet out of the sticky mud; otherwise we would have fallen flat on our faces in the water. The muck had a stink like a pig-sty.

Les threw the big branch out of sight.

"If Old Howes ever comes down while we're here and tells us to get out of the creek, let's throw muck at him. Are you game, Jack? Wouldn't you like to do that to him just once?"

"That's what we ought to do to him, but we'd better not, Les. He would go straight and tell my folks, and your Pa."

"I'm not scared of Old Howes," Les said, making a face. "And he wouldn't do anything. He's scared to tell anybody. He knows we'd catch him some time and mud-cake him."

"I don't know," I said. "He told on me that time I caught his drake and put it in that chicken run of his."

"That was a long time—" Les stopped and listened.

Somebody had stepped on a dead twig behind the bushes. The crack of the wood was loud enough to be heard above the splashing and gurgling in the creek.

"What's that?" both of us said.

"Who's that?" Les asked me.

"Listen!" I said. "Duck down and be quiet."

Behind the bushes we could hear someone walking on dead twigs and dry leaves. Both of us squatted down in the water until only our heads were above it.

" Who is it ? " Les whispered to me.

I shook my head, holding my nose under the water.

The yellow water swirled and gurgled through the tree roots beside us. The roots had been washed free of earth by the high waters many years before and now they were old-looking and covered with bark.

Les squatted lower and lower until only his eyes and the top of his head were showing. He held his nose under the water with both hands.

The water was high, and its swiftness and muddy-heaviness made gurgling sounds that echoed up and down the creek.

Suddenly the bushes parted, and Jenny came through. When Les saw her, his eyes popped open and he jerked his head above the water to get his breath. The noise he made when the water bubbled scared all three of us for a moment.

Jenny was Old Howes' daughter. She was about our age, possibly a year or two older.

Les saw her looking at our clothes hanging on the bushes. He nudged me with his elbow.

" What are you doing down here ? " Les said gruffly, trying to scare her.

" Can't I come if I want to ? "

" You can't come down here when we're in swimming. You're not a boy."

" I can come if I wish to, smarty," Jenny said. " This creek doesn't belong to you."

" It doesn't belong to you, either," Les said, making a face. " What are you going to do about that ? "

" All right," Jenny said, " if you are going to be so mean about it, Leslie Blake, I'll take your clothes and hide them where you'll never find them as long as you live. What are you going to do about that ? "

Jenny reached for the clothes. She grabbed Les's pants and my shirt and union suit.

Les caught my arm and pulled me towards the bank. We couldn't hurry at first, because we had to jerk our feet out of the muck before we could move at all.

" Let's duck her, Jack," Les whispered. " Let's give her a good ducking. Come on."

We crawled up the bank and caught Jenny just as she was starting to run through the bushes with our clothes. Les locked his arms around her waist and I caught her arms and pulled as hard as I could.

" I'll scream ! " Jenny said. " If you don't stop, I'll scream at

the top of my lungs. Papa is in the pasture, and he'll come right away. You know what he'll do to both of you, don't you ? "

" We're not afraid of anybody," Les said, scowling and trying to scare her.

I put my hand over her mouth and held her with one arm locked around her neck. Together we pulled and dragged her back to the bank beside the creek.

" Don't you want to duck her, Jack ? " Les said. " Don't you think we ought to ? She's been telling Old Howes tales about us. She's a tattle-tale tit."

" We ought to duck her, all right," I said. " But suppose she goes and tells on us about that ? "

" When we get through ducking her, she won't tell any more tales on us. We'll duck her until she promises and crosses her heart never to tell anybody. She's the one who's been throwing dead wood into the creek every day. I'll bet anything she's the one who's been doing it."

Jenny was helpless while we held her. Les had her around the waist with both arms, and I still held her neck locked in the crook of my left arm.

She tried to bite my hand over her mouth, but every time she tried to hurt me, I squeezed her neck so hard she had to stop.

I was a little afraid to duck Jenny, because once we had ducked another boy named Bisco, and it had almost drowned him. We ducked Bisco so many times he couldn't breathe, and he became limp all over. We had to stretch him out on the ground and roll him over and over, and all the time we were doing that, yellow creek water was running out of his mouth. I was afraid we might drown Jenny. I didn't know what would happen to us if we did that.

" I know what let's do to her, Les," I said.

" What ? "

" Let's mud-cake her."

" What's the matter with ducking her ? It will scare her and make her stop throwing dead branches into the creek. It'll stop her from telling tales about us, too."

" We'd better not duck her, Les," I said. " Remember the time we ducked Bisco ? We nearly drowned him. I don't want anything like that to happen again."

Les thought a while, looking at Jenny's back. She was kicking and scratching all the time, but she couldn't begin to hurt us, and we had her so she couldn't get loose.

" All right," Les said. " We'll mud-cake her then. That's just as good as ducking, and it'll teach her a lesson. It'll make her stop being a tattle-tale tit."

" She's going to tell on us anyway, so we'd better do a good job of it this time. But it ought to make her stop throwing dead branches into the swimming hole, anyway."

" She won't tell on us after we get through with her," Les said. " She won't tell anybody. She won't even tell Old Howes. Ducking and mud-caking always stop kids from telling tales. It's the only way to cure it."

" All right," I said, " let's do it to her. She needs ducking, or mud-caking, or something. Somebody has got to do it to her, and we're the right ones to make a good job of it. I'll bet she won't bother us again after we get through with her."

Les threw Jenny on the ground beside the bank, locking her arms behind her back and holding her face in the earth so she couldn't make any noise. Les had to straddle her neck to keep her still.

" Take off her clothes, Jack," Les said. " I've got her. She can't get away as long as I'm holding her."

I reached down to pull off her dress and she kicked me full in the stomach with both feet.

When I fell backward and tried to sit up, there was no breath left in me. I opened my mouth and tried to yell at Les, but I couldn't even whisper.

" What's the matter, Jack ? " Les said, turning his head and looking at me.

I got up on both knees and doubled over, holding my stomach with both arms.

" What's the matter with you, Jack ? " he said. " Did she kick you ? "

Les's back had been turned and he had not seen what Jenny had done to me.

" Did she kick me ! " I said weakly. " It must have been her, but it felt like a mule. She knocked all the wind out of me."

" Sit on her legs, then," Les said. " She can't kick you if you do that."

I ran down to the side of the creek and came back with a double handful of yellow muck.

When I dug it out of the creek, it had made a sucking sound, and the odour was worse than any that ever came out of a pig-sty. The muck in the creek stank worse than anything I had ever smelled. It was nothing but rotted leaves and mud, but it smelled like decayed eggs and a lot of other things.

I got Jenny's dress off and tossed it on the bushes so it would not get covered with muck. Les was able to hold her arms and cover her mouth at the same time by then, because she was not nearly so strong as either of us.

"She's got underwear on, Les," I said.

"Sure she has," Les said. "All girls wear underclothes. That's what makes them so sissy."

"You're not talking about me, are you?" I said, looking at him. "Because if you are—"

"I'm talking about her," Les said. "I know you have to wear the stuff because your people make you do it. But girls like to have it on. They don't want to go without it. That's why girls are so sissy."

"All right," I said, "but don't try to get nasty with me because I'll—"

"You won't do anything, so shut up. Hurry and take her clothes off."

"Are we going to strip her naked?" I said.

"Sure," Les said. "We've got to. We can't mud-cake her if we don't strip her, can we?"

"I know that," I said, "but suppose Old Howes came down and saw us—"

"Old Howes wouldn't do nothing but spit and slip up in it. Who's scared of him, anyway? I'm not."

After we had struggled with Jenny a while longer, and after her underclothes were finally off, Les said he was tired of holding her. He was puffing and blowing as if he had been running five miles without stopping to rest.

I took Jenny's arms and put my hand over her mouth and sat on her neck. Les picked up a big handful of muck and threw it at her. The muck struck her on the stomach, making a sound like slapping water with a plank. He threw another handful. It splattered all over us.

While Les was running to the creek for another load, I turned Jenny over so he could smear some on her back.

She did not struggle any more now, but I was afraid to release my grip on her arms or to take my hand off her mouth. When I had turned her over, she lay motionless on the ground, not even kicking her feet any more.

"This'll fix her," Les said, coming back with his hands and arms full of yellow muck. "She's had it coming to her for a long time. Maybe it'll stop her from being a tattle-tale tit."

He dropped the mass on her back and ran back for some more.

"Rub that in while I'm getting another load, Jack," he said. "That's what she needs to make her stop throwing dead wood into the creek. She won't tell any more tales about us, either."

I reached over and with one hand smeared the muck up and down Jenny's back, on her legs, and over her arms and shoulders. I tried not to get any of it in her hair, because I knew how hard it

was to try to wash it out with yellow creek water.

"Turn her over," Les said, dropping down beside us with a new load of muck. "We're just getting started on her."

I turned Jenny over again, and she did not even try to get loose from me. Les had begun to spread the muck over her, rubbing it into her skin. He took a handful and smeared it over her legs and thighs and stomach. Then he took another handful and rubbed it over her shoulders and breasts.

Jenny still did not attempt to move, though she squirmed a little when Les rubbed the most tender parts of her body with the mass of rotted leaves and mud. Most of the time she lay as still as if she had been sound asleep.

"That's funny," I said.

"What's funny?" Les asked, looking up.

"She's not even trying to get loose now."

"That's because she's foxy," Les said. "She's just waiting for a good chance to break away. Here, let me hold her a while."

Les took my place and I picked up a handful of muck and began spreading it over her. The muck was not sticky any longer and when I smeared it on her, it felt slick and smooth. When my hands moved over her, I could feel that her body was much softer than mine, and that parts of her were very soft. When I smeared the slick mud over her breasts, it felt so smooth and soft that I was afraid to touch her there again.

I glanced at her face, and I saw her looking at me. From the way she looked at me, I could not help thinking that she was not angry with us for treating her like that. I even thought that perhaps if Les had not been there she would have let me mud-cake her as long as I wished to.

"What are you doing, Jack?" Les said. "That's a funny way to spread muck on her."

"We've got enough on her, Les. Let's not put any more on her. Let's let her go home now. She's had enough."

"What's the matter with you?" Les said, scowling. "We're not half finished with her yet. We've got to put another coat of muck on her."

Jenny looked up when Les said that, and her eyes opened wider. She did not have to speak to tell me what she wished to say.

"That's enough, Les," I said. "She's a girl. That's enough for a girl."

I don't know, but somehow I believed that Les felt the same way I did, only he did not want to admit it. Now that we had stripped her and had smeared her all over with muck, neither of us could forget that Jenny was a girl. We had treated her as though she were a boy, but she remained a girl still.

"If we let you up now, will you promise not to yell?" Les asked her. Jenny nodded her head, and Les dropped his hand from her mouth.

We both expected to hear her say what she was going to do, and what she was going to tell, because of the way we had treated her; but the moment she was freed she sat up quickly and tried to cover herself with her arms, without once speaking.

As soon as we saw that she was not going to call for Old Howes, Les and I ran to the creek and dived head-on into it. We squatted down until only our heads were showing above the water and began scrubbing the muck off us. Jenny looked at us, covering herself as much as she could.

She still had not said anything to us.

"Let's get dressed and run for home," Les said. "Pa would tear me up into little pieces if he caught me down here now, with her like that."

Jenny covered her eyes while we dashed out of the water and grabbed our clothes. We ran behind the bushes to dress. While we were standing there, we could hear Jenny splashing in the creek, scrubbing the muck from her.

Les had only his shirt and pants to put on, and he was ready to go before I could even straighten out my union suit. He buckled his pants and started backing off with his shirt tail hanging out while he tried to find the right buttons for the buttonholes. I had been in such a hurry to jump into the creek when we first came that I had tangled my union suit, and when I could get the arms straight, the legs would be wrong side out. Les kept backing farther and farther away from me.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Why don't you hurry?"

"I can't get this union suit untangled."

"That's what you get for wearing underclothes in summer."

"I can't help it," I said, "and you know it."

"Well, it's not my fault, is it?"

"Aren't you going to wait for me?"

"I can't, Jack," he said, backing away faster. He suddenly turned around and began running. "I've got to go home."

"I thought you said you weren't scared of Old Howes, or of anybody else!" I yelled after him, but if he heard me, he pretended not to understand what I had said.

After Les had gone, I took my time. There was no need to hurry, because I was certain that no matter what time I got home, Jenny would tell Old Howes what we had done to her, and he would come and tell my folks all about it. I wished to have plenty of time to think of what I was going to say when I had to face everybody

and tell the truth.

Jenny had left the creek by the time I was ready to button my shirt, and she had only to slip her underclothes over her head and to put on her dress to be ready to go home.

She came through the bushes while I was still fumbling with my shirt buttons.

" What's the matter, Jack ? " she asked smiling just a little. " Why didn't you run off with Leslie ? "

" I couldn't get dressed any quicker," I said.

I was about to tell her how my union suit was so tangled that I had had to spend most of the time struggling with that, but I thought better of saying it.

She came several steps closer, and I started to run from her.

" Where are you going ? " she said. " What are you running for ? "

I stopped, turned around, and looked at Jenny. Now that she was dressed, she looked the same as she had always looked. She was the same in appearance, but somehow I knew that she was not the same, after what had happened beside the creek. I could not forget the sensation of her body. As I looked at her, I believed I felt it again because I knew that without the dress and the underclothes she would always remain the same as she was when I had first touched her.

" Why don't you wait for me, Jack ? " she said.

I wanted to run away from her, and I wanted to run to her. I stood still while she came closer.

" But you're going to tell, aren't you ? Aren't you going to tell what we did to you ? "

She had come to where I stood, and I turned and walked beside her, several feet away. We went through the bushes and out through the woods to the road. There was no one in sight, and we walked together until we reached her house.

Just before we got to the gate I felt my hand touch hers. I don't know, but somehow, whether it was true or not, I believed she had taken my hand and held it in hers for a moment. When I suddenly looked to see, because I wanted to know if she really had taken my hand and squeezed it, she turned the other way and went through the gate.

I waited in the middle of the road until she walked up the front steps and crossed the porch. She stopped there a moment and brushed her dress with her hands, as if she wanted to be sure that there was no muck clinging to it.

When she opened the door and went inside, I was not certain whether she had glanced at me over her shoulder or whether I merely imagined she had. Anyway I believed she had because I

felt her looking at me, just as I was sure that she had held my hand for a moment.

"Jenny won't tell," I said, running up the road towards home. "Jenny won't tell," I kept saying over and over again all the way there.

* * *

FIND THE LADY!

A toast to the Ladies, God bless 'em. There are ten in our pack—can you find them? Count one point for the name of the Lady, one for the source, and a third for the author, making a possible total of thirty. The answers are on page 127.

1. *Her sunny locks hung on her temples like a golden fleece, and her suitors were eager as Jasons to win her hand.*
2. *A pepper pot appeared a necessary adjunct to this noble lady's nursery—or was it a kitchen?*
3. *Night after night she postponed her own execution by adding a new instalment to the intriguing serial story she told her royal husband.*
4. *Her talented biographer describes her as "toujours gai," but her own comment on the state of her love affairs was: "one damned kitten after another!"*
5. *Her hero husband's signet ring betrayed to her his dangerous secret. But she crossed the Channel into the stronghold of the revolutionaries, to prove her love.*
6. *Bride of a few hours, she fell in love with her husband's overlord, but postponing their flight by days into weeks, and finally into a life time, nothing remained of their love but the craftsman's art.*
7. *On holiday in England, with a discreet flirtation on hand, she was invited to lecture to the Home for Fallen Women. And who more able?*
8. *When her husband had nightmares, this practical soul advised him to take a purgative from the herbs growing close by in their yard.*
9. *Children's voices should be dear*
   (Call once more) to a mother's ear . . .
   "Mother dear, we cannot stay!"
   The wild, white horses foam and fret.
   Margaret! Margaret!
10. *And the girl-friend of a famous sailor—his name? Popeye!*

THE LONG YEARS

"He didn't teach us," she said. "He didn't want us to know"

by R. BRADBURY

WHENEVER the wind came through the sky, he and his small family would sit in the stone hut and warm their hands over a small fire. The wind would stir the canal waters and almost blow the stars out of the sky, but Mr. Hathaway would sit contented and talk to his wife, and his wife would talk back, and he would talk to his two daughters and his son about the old days on Earth and they would all reply neatly.

It was the twentieth year after the Great War. Mars was a tomb planet. Whether or not Earth was the same was a matter for much silent debate for Hathaway and for his family, during the long Martian nights.

This night one of the usual Martian dust storms had come over the low hexagonal tomb buildings, whining past the great ancient gargoyles on the iron mountains, blowing between the last standing pillars of the old city, and tearing away the plastic walls of the newer, British-built city that was melting down into the sand, desolated.

The storm abated suddenly. Hathaway rose from the family circle from time to time and went out into the suddenly clear weather to look at Earth burning green there on the windy sky. He put his hand up for a moment, as one might reach up a hand to adjust a dimly burning light globe in the ceiling of a dark room. Then he spoke quietly to himself, as he looked across the long dead sea bottoms. Not another living thing on this entire planet, he thought. Just himself. And *them*. He looked back inside the stone hut.

What was happening on Earth now ? He stared up until his eyes watered with strain. He had seen no visible sign of change in the aspect of Earth through his thirty-inch telescope. Well, he thought, he was good for another twenty years if he was careful. Someone might come. Either across the dead seas, or out of space in a rocket, on a little thread of red flame.

He peered into the hut. " I think I'll take a walk," he said.

His wife did not turn.

" I said," he cried, " I think I'll take a walk."

" All right," his wife said.

" That's better."

He turned and walked quietly down through a series of low ruins. " *Made in Birmingham*," he read from a piece of metal as he passed. " This will all be gone long before the old Martian ruins." He looked towards the ten-thousand-year-old city that lay on the rim of a dead sea twenty miles wide.

He walked on, came to the Martian graveyard, a series of small hexagonal stones and buildings set in the top of a hill. The drifting sand had never covered them because the hill was too high and swept by the winds.

He stood for a moment, looking down at four graves with crude wooden crosses on them, and names. Tears did not come to his eyes. He did nothing with his eyes. They had dried up long ago.

" Do you forgive me for what I have done ? " he asked of the crosses. " I was so lonely," he said. " You *do* forgive me, don't you ? "

He returned to the stone hut and once more, just before going inside, he shaded his eyes with his hands, searching the sky.

" You keep waiting and waiting and looking and looking," he said. " And one night, perhaps—"

There was a tiny point of red flame in the sky.

" And you *keep* looking," he said. He stopped. He looked down at the ground. Then he stepped away from the light of the stone hut. "—And you look *again*," he whispered.

The tiny flame point was still there.

" It wasn't there last night," he murmured.

" It *is* red," he said, finally.

And then, holding himself against the side of the stone hut, he was suddenly sick, his stomach moving dryly in him, trying to force out food that was not there. He succeeded in ejecting with great pain a thin bitter trickle of yellow fluid. His eyes were wet with the pain of the dry vomiting. He stood up.

He stumbled and fell, picked himself up, got around behind the hut and swivelled the telescope so that it pointed into the sky.

A minute later, after long, wild staring, he appeared in the low doorway of the stone hut. He stared at the fire. The wife and the two daughters and the son watched him. Finally he said, " I have good news. I have looked at the sky—a ship is coming to take us all home. A rocket is coming. It will be here in the early morning."

He put his hands down and put his head into his hands and began to cry, gently.

He burned what was left of New London that morning at three.

He took a torch and moved into the plastic-and-wood city and with the flame touched the walls here and there. The city went up in great tosses of heat and light. When he walked back out of the city

it was a square mile of illumination, big enough to be seen out in space. It would beckon the rocket down to Mr. Hathaway and his family.

His heart beating rapidly, he returned to the hut where the family waited. " See," he said. He held up an old bottle into the light. " Wine I saved. Just for tonight. I knew that perhaps one day someone would come. And so I saved this. I hid it in the storage shed. We'll have a drink and celebrate ! "

He popped the cork out and poured five glasses full. His wife and the three children picked up their glasses, smiling.

" It's been a long time," he said, gravely looking into his drink. " Remember the day the War broke out ? How long ago ? Nineteen years and seven months, exactly. And all the rockets were called home from Mars, and you and I and the children were out in the mountains, doing archæological work, doing research on the ancient methods of surgery used by the Martians ; it helped me a lot in my own work. We forced our horses on, almost killing them, but got back here to the city a week late. Everyone was gone. Every rocket had left without waiting for stragglers, remember, remember ? And it turned out we were the only ones left ? Lord, Lord, how the years pass. It seems only a day, now. I couldn't have stood it without you here, all of you. I couldn't have stood it at all. I'd have killed myself without you. But with you it was worth waiting. Here's to *us*, then." He raised his drink. " And to our long wait together. And here's to *them*." He gestured at the sky. " May they land safely and—" A troubled frown, " —may they be friends when they land."

He drank his wine.

The wife and three children raised their glasses to their lips.

The wine ran down over the chins of all four of them.

By morning the city was blowing in great black soft flakes across the sea bottom. The fire was exhausted, but it had served its purpose ; the red spot on the sky grew larger.

From the stone hut came the rich brown smell of baked gingerbread. His wife stood over the table, setting down the hot pans of new bread as Hathaway entered. The two daughters were gently sweeping the bare stone floor with stiff brooms and the son was polishing the silverware.

" We will have a breakfast for them, for everyone in the crew," said Hathaway. " You must all put on your best clothes."

He walked across his land to the vast metal storage shed. Inside was the cold-storage unit and power plant he had repaired and restored with his efficient, small, nervous fingers over the years, just as he had repaired clocks and telephones and spool recorders in his spare time. The shed was full of things he had built, some of them

senseless mechanisms the functions of which were a mystery even to himself now as he looked at them.

From the storage deep-freeze compartment he now carried frozen cartons of beans and strawberries, twenty years old. Lazarus come forth, he thought, as he pulled out a cool chicken.

The air was full of cooking odours when the rocket landed.

Like a young boy Hathaway ran down the hill. He had to stop once because of a sudden sickening pain in his chest. He sat on a rock to regain his breath, then got up and ran all the rest of the way.

He stood in the hot atmosphere generated by the fiery heat of the rocket exhausts. A vent opened in the side of the machine and a man stood in the round entrance.

The man leaped down and walked across the sand swiftly, his hand out. " We expected nothing and here *you* are."

Their hands clasped and held ; they looked into each other's faces.

" Why, you're Hathaway. I *know* you." The man was amazed. His grip tightened. His mouth opened and shut and opened again, speechless. " Hathaway ! When I was a kid, twenty years ago, I saw you in the television set at school. I watched you perform a difficult surgery for a cerebral tumour."

" Thank you, thank you."

The man from the rocket looked beyond Hathaway. " You're alone ? Your wife, I remember her. And there were children—"

" My son, my daughters, my wife—but, your name ? "

" Squadron Leader Parsons, of Joliet, Kent, sir."

" Squadron Leader Parsons." They were not done with the handshaking yet. " How many in your crew ? "

" Twenty, sir."

" Fine, there's a good breakfast waiting all of you up the hill. Will you come ? "

" Will we come ! " said the squadron leader. He turned and looked at the rocket. " Abandon ship ! "

It was done in half a minute.

They walked up the hill together, Hathaway and the squadron leader, the men following dutifully and talkatively behind, taking in deep breaths of the thin Martian air. The sun rose and it was a good day. It would be warm later. Blue smoke lifted from the stone hut.

" I'm sorry." Hathaway sat down abruptly in the sand, his hand on his chest. " All the excitement. I'll have to rest." He felt his heart moving under his hand. He counted the beats. It was not good.

" We have a doctor with us," said Parsons. " I beg your pardon, sir, I know you *are* one, but we'd best check you with our own and if you need anything—"

" I'll be all right—the excitement, the waiting." Hathaway could hardly breathe. His face was pale and wet, his lips blue. His hand trembled. " You know," he said, as the doctor came up and put a stethoscope against him, " it's as though I've kept alive just for this day, all those years, and now that you're here and I know Earth is still alive—well, I can lie down and give up."

" You can't do that, sir, there's the breakfast to eat," insisted Parsons gently. " A fine host that would be."

" Here," and the doctor gave Hathaway a small yellow pellet. " You're badly over-excited. It might be a good idea if we carried you."

" Nonsense, just let me sit here a moment. It's good to see you all. It's good to hear your names. What were they again ? You introduced me, but when you're excited you don't see or hear or do anything right. Parsons and Glasbow and Williamson and Hamilton and Spaulding and Ellison and Smith and someone named Brackett and that's all I remember." He smiled weakly, his eyes squinted. " See how good I am ? "

" Splendid. Did the pellet work ? "

" Well enough. Here we go."

They walked on up the hill.

" Alice, come out and see who we have here," Hathaway called into the hut. The men of the rocket stood waiting and smiling. Hathaway frowned slightly and bent into the doorway once more. " Alice, did you hear, come out now."

His wife appeared in the doorway. A moment later the two daughters, tall and gracious, came out, followed by an even taller son.

" Squadron Leader Parsons, my wife. Alice, this is Squadron Leader Parsons."

" Mrs. Hathaway, I remember you from a long time ago."

" Squadron Leader Parsons." She shook his hand and turned, still holding his hand. " My daughters, Marguerite and Susan. My son, John. Squadron Leader Parsons."

Hathaway stood smiling as hands were shaken all round.

Parsons sniffed the air. " Is that *gingerbread* ? "

" Will you have some ? "

Everybody laughed. Folding tables were carried down and set up by the wide canal. While hot food was brought out and set down and plates were placed about with fine silverware and damask napkins, Squadron Leader Parsons looked first at Mrs. Hathaway and then at her son and then at her two tall, gracious daughters. He sat upon a folding chair which the son brought him. " How old are you, John ? "

The son replied, " Twenty-three."

Parsons looked quickly down at his silverware. His face was quite suddenly pale and sickly. The man next to Parsons said, " Sir, that can't be right."

" What's that, Williamson ? " asked Parsons.

" I'm thirty-eight myself, sir. I was at school the same time as young John Hathaway there, twenty years ago. And he says he's only twenty-three. And he only *looks* twenty-three. But that can't be right. He should be thirty-eight."

" I know," said Parsons, quietly.

" What does it mean, sir ? "

" I don't know."

" You don't look well, sir."

" I'm not feeling very well. Will you do me a favour ? "

" Yes, sir."

" I want you to run a little errand for me. I'll tell you where to go and what to check. When there's an opportunity slip away. It should take you only five minutes. The place is not far from here."

" Yes, sir."

" Here, what are you two talking about so seriously ? " Mrs. Hathaway ladled quick ladles of soup into their bowls. " Smile now, we're all together, the trip's over and it's like home ! "

" Yes, ma'am," said Squadron Leader Parsons. " You look very young, Mrs. Hathaway."

" Isn't that like a man ? " She gave him an extra ladle of soup.

Parsons watched her move away. Her face was filled with warmth; it was smooth and unwrinkled. She walked around the tables and placed things neatly and laughed at every joke. She stopped never once to sit and take her breath. And the son and daughters were brilliant and witty as their father, telling of the long years and their quiet life, while their father looked proudly on.

The breakfast went on. Mid-way, Williamson slipped quietly off and walked down the hill.

" Where is *he* going so suddenly ? " inquired Hathaway.

" He'll be right back ; there's some stuff he's to check in the rocket," explained Parsons. " But, as I was saying, sir, there wasn't much left of Great Britain. The isolated country towns were about all. London was in ruins. It took twenty years to get things back on an even keel, what with the radio-activity and all. Europe is still a shambles and America isn't much better off than we are." Parsons talked automatically, not listening to himself, thinking only of Williamson going down the hill and coming back to tell what he had found.

" Ours is the only rocket now available," went on Parsons. " There'll be more in about four years. We're here on a preliminary survey to see what's left of our colonies. Not much here. Perhaps

more over at the American settlement in New Chicago. We'll check there this afternoon. Thanks," he said, as Marguerite Hathaway filled his water glass. He touched her hand, suddenly. She did not even mind it. Her hand was warm.

Hathaway, at the head of the table, paused long enough to press his hand to his chest. Then he went on, listening to the talk, looking now and then with concern at Parsons, who did not seem to be enjoying his meal.

On arrival, Williamson was agitated and his cheeks were white. He could not keep his mind on his food ; he kept picking at it until the squadron leader whispered aside to him, " Well ? "

" I found it, sir."

" And ? "

Williamson kept his eyes on the party. People were laughing. The daughters were smiling gravely and blinking and the son was telling a joke. Hathaway was smoking a cigarette, his first really fresh one in years. Williamson said, " I went into the graveyard."

" The four crosses were there ? "

" The four crosses were there, sir. The names were still on them. I wrote them down to be sure." He produced a white paper and read from it : " Alice Hathaway. Marguerite, Susan and John Hathaway. All four died of the plague in July, 1997."

" Thank you, Williamson," said Parsons. He closed his eyes.

" Twenty years ago, sir," said Williamson, his hands trembling.

" Yes," said Parsons.

" Then, who are *these* ! "

" I don't know, Williamson."

" What are you going to do, sir ? "

" I don't know that either," Parsons said, slowly.

" Will we tell the other men ? "

" No, not yet. Later. Go on with your food as if nothing had happened."

" I'm not very hungry now, sir."

They both began on their dessert.

The meal ended with wine brought from the rocket. Hathaway rose to his feet, holding his glass. " A toast to all of you ; it is good to be with friends again." He moved his wine-glass ever so little in the air. " And to my wife and my children, without whom I could not have survived alone. It is only through their kindness in caring for me that I have lived on, waiting for your arrival." He moved his glass towards his wife, towards his children, who looked back self-consciously, lowering their eyes at last as everyone drank.

Parsons' eyelids were flickering nervously. His hands were moving uneasily on his lap. His lips were quite blue.

Hathaway drank down his wine. He did not cry out as he fell forward on to the table and then slipped towards the ground. Several of the men caught and eased him to the ground where the doctor felt his chest, listened and remained there, listening.

The doctor looked up and shook his head. Parsons knelt and took the old man's hand. " Parsons ? " Hathaway's voice was barely audible. " I had to spoil the breakfast."

" Never mind," said Parsons.

" Say goodbye to Alice and the children for me," said the old man.

Parsons said, " Just a moment, I'll call them."

" No, no, don't—they wouldn't understand ! I wouldn't *want* them to understand ! No, don't ! " whispered Hathaway.

Parsons did not move.

A moment later Hathaway was dead.

Parsons waited for a long time. Then he arose and walked away from the small stunned group around Hathaway. He went to Alice Hathaway, looked into her face and said, " Do you know what has just happened ? "

" Something about my husband," she said.

" He's just passed away ; his heart," said Parsons, watching her.

" I'm sorry," she said.

" How do you feel ? " he asked.

" He didn't want us to feel badly. He told us it would happen one day and he didn't want us to cry. He didn't teach us how, you know. He didn't want us to know. He said it was the worst thing that could happen to a man to know how to be lonely and to know how to be sad and then to cry. So we're not to know what crying is or being sad."

Parsons looked off at the mountains. He glanced at her hands, the soft warm hands and the fine manicured nails and the tapered wrists. He looked at the slender smooth white neck and the intelligent eyes. He said finally, " Mr. Hathaway did a fine job on you and your children."

" He would like to have heard you say that. He was so very proud of us. After a while he even forgot that he had made us. At the end he loved and took us as his real wife and children. And, in a way, we *are*."

" You gave him a great deal of comfort," said Parsons.

" Yes, over the years we sat and talked and talked. He so much loved to talk. He liked the stone hut and the open fire. We could have lived in a regular house in the town, but he liked it up here, where he could be primitive if he liked, or modern if he liked. He told me all about his laboratory and the things he did in it. He wired the entire deserted town below with loud speakers and when he pressed a button the town lit up and made noises as if ten thousand

people lived in it. There were aeroplane noises and car noises and the sounds of people talking. He would sit and light a cigarette and talk to us and the sounds would come up from the town and once in a while the 'phone would ring and a recorded voice would ask Mr. Hathaway scientific and surgical questions and he would answer them. With the 'phone ringing and us here and the sounds of the town and the cigarette, Mr. Hathaway was quite happy."

"Twenty years," said Parsons.

"There's only one thing he couldn't make us do," she said, "and that was to grow old. He got older every day but we stayed the same. I suppose he didn't mind. I suppose he wanted us this way."

"We'll bury him down in the yard where the other four crosses are. I think he would like that."

She put her hand on his wrist, lightly. "I'm sure he would."

Orders were given. The wife and the three children followed the little procession down the hill. Two men carried Hathaway on a covered stretcher. They passed the stone hut and the storage shed where Hathaway, twenty years ago, had begun his work. Parsons stepped from the procession a moment to stand within the doorway of the workshop.

How would it be to live on a planet with a wife and three children, he wondered, then to have them die of the plague, leaving you alone with wind and silence? What would a person do? Bury them with crosses in the graveyard and then come back up to the workshop and with all the power of mind and memory and accuracy of finger and genius, put together, bit by bit, all those things that were wife, son, daughters. With an entire modern city below from which to draw needed supplies, a brilliant man might do anything.

Parsons returned to the procession. The sound of their footsteps was muffled in the sand. At the graveyard, as they turned in, two men were already spading out the earth.

The men came back to the rocket in the late afternoon. They stood in a circle around the squadron leader.

Williamson nodded up at the stone hut. "What are you going to do about *them*?"

"I don't know," said Parsons.

"Are you going to do anything about them?"

"Do anything about them?" Parsons looked faintly surprised.

"You're not going to take them back with us?"

"No, we haven't space for them."

"You mean you're going to leave them here, like *that*, as they *are*!"

The squadron leader gave Williamson a gun. "If you can do something about this, you're a better man than I."

Five minutes later Williamson returned from the hut, sweating.

He handed the gun back. "Here, take it. Know what you mean, now. I went in with the gun. One of the daughters looked up at me. She smiled. So did the others. The wife said something about sitting down for a cup of tea. Lord, it would be murder!" He shook his head.

Parsons nodded. "There'll never be anything as fine as them again, ever. They're built to last; ten, fifty, two húndred years. Yes, they've as much right to—to life as you or I or any of us." He knocked out his pipe. "Well, get aboard. We're taking off. This city's done for; we'll not be using it."

It was getting late in the day. The wind was rising. All the men were aboard. Then Parsons hesitated. Williamson looked at him and said, "Don't tell me you're going back to say—goodbye—to them?"

The squadron leader looked at Williamson coldly. "None of your business."

Parsons walked up towards the hut through the darkening wind. The men in the rocket saw his shadow lingering inside the stone hut door. They saw a woman's shadow. They saw Parsons put out his hand to shake her hand.

Moments later, he came running back to the rocket.

On nights when the wind comes over the dead sea bottoms and through the hexagonal graveyard, over four old crosses and one new fresh one, there is a light burning in the low stone hut; and in that hut, as the wind roars by and the dust sifts down and the cold stars burn, are four figures: a woman, two daughters, a son, tending a low fire for no reason and talking and laughing.

Night after night for every year and every year, for no reason at all, the wife comes out and looks at the sky, her hands up, for a long moment, looking at the green burning of Earth, not knowing why she looks, and then she goes back and throws a stick on the fire, and the wind comes up and the dead sea goes on being dead.

* * *

SIMPLE ARITHMETIC

The more I earn, the faster my means vanish into the Exchequer . . . My haunting dread is that some of my many admirers, by dying and leaving me a million or so, may confine me to an almshouse.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, in a letter to *The Times*

LIGHT

Everywhere was quite still—like the beginning of the world

by LIAM O'FLAHERTY

THERE was total darkness. The tropic air was motionless. There was no sound but the gentle murmur of the waves that rolled across the beach. The smell of the sea was drowned in the heavy perfume of the jungle.

Then the dawn wind came whispering from the east. It swept through the level forest of tall cypress trees, through the mangrove swamps and through the belt of drooping palms that fringed the shore.

The trunks of the cypress swayed before the impact of the breeze. Their topmost branches brushed against each other. The mangroves shook their pendent roots and dipped them towards the earth, as if in homage. The sedge grass leaned over, rustling like silken dresses in a dance. Dead twigs snapped and fell.

The pointed leaves of the palm trees trembled on either side of their spear-shaped blades, like a myriad oars feathering in frenzied haste about a fleet of galleys.

The confused symphony that the wind wrought within the darkness was the earth's long sigh of awakening. Light began to come at once. Land, sea and sky took on a robe of uniform grey. Dim shapes came swimming in ghoulish silence from behind the torn veil of night. The air turned cool. The wind died down. All became still, as at the beginning of the world, except for the drowsy murmur of the waves.

Then the sun rose above the tops of the giant cypress trees and sent a fiery blaze across the eastern sky. Its rays spread everywhere with magic speed, painting the earth with colours of divine loveliness. There was tumult in the forest, as life sprang into action at the urging of the voluptuous heat. Now the symphony was triumphant, as the myriads of risen creatures gave voice.

For a little while the beach remained still. Then a flock of sand-larks came running by the edge of the surf, their long grey legs like swiftly moving matchsticks under their motionless oval trunks. Their hungry eyes searched the curving rim of the tide, on which gaily painted shells and pieces of sponge were rolling to

the shore. Seagulls came after the sand-larks, running sideways and scavenging on the dead fish that protruded from the shells.

Black vultures swooped from the clouds in groups of two and three. They dropped on to the sand near the carcass of a shark that they had picked clean on the previous day. They waddled to and fro around the skeleton, hungrily searching the white bones for another morsel. Then they stood close together in a half-circle. They leaned back and held up their half-opened wings to the increasing heat of the sun. The pale flesh on their naked heads and throats looked obscene, as they stood blinking and swaying like drunkards with their raised wings half spread.

Pelicans came in pursuit of the fish that leaped from the waters by the shore. They flew low, barely moving their giant wings and with their cunning eyes downcast. Now and again one of them dived at great speed, seized his prey and flopped on to the water with a loud splash. Then he raised his head and shook the capacious bag of his gullet violently to engulf the fish.

White herons rose from the marshes, flying with dream-like elegance. Their long black legs trailed like stiff pieces of string from their bellies. They alighted on the mangrove trees that faced the shore. Soon the whole shimmering green surface of the mangroves was speckled with spots of dazzling white.

A black sow, followed by six tiny black piglets and by a black boar, came from the jungle in a row. They walked along the sand high up, where there were banks of withered shells. Now and again the boar halted to rummage with his snout among the shells. Then he ran smartly to rejoin the others.

The pigs halted when they came abreast of the white tent that was pitched under a cluster of palm trees, by the edge of a narrow creek where a boat was moored. They grunted and stood close together in a row. They came closer and began to sniff. Then they raised their snouts and listened attentively as a noise came from within the tent.

Presently the flap was opened and a girl walked out on to the sand. She was naked except for a large white towel that she carried around her neck. The pigs took fright, turned and ran grunting to the jungle. They halted and looked back at her when they reached its edge. Then they turned once more and went crashing through the underbrush.

The girl walked slowly towards the sea. Her short golden hair shimmered in the sunlight. The rest of her body was the colour of bronze. She spread the towel on the sand near the water. Then she raised her hands above her head, stretched herself and ran shouting through the tide.

A young man came from the tent just as the girl reached deep water. He shouted to her as he ran down the sand. She turned, waved to him and then plunged. She began to swim, with her short hair floating behind her on the surface. The man plunged and swam after her.

He soon reached her side and they swam far out together. The man's hair was black and his skin was the colour of old oak. They landed far up the beach.

The girl began to run as soon as they touched shore. The man ran after her. He caught her, put his palm against the small of her back and raised her high above his head. There she lay, with her limbs and her wet hair dangling, laughing at the top of her voice.

He ran with her limp body raised that way above his head, back towards the towel, by the edge of the surf. The muscles of his small hard buttocks rose and fell as he ran. The girl kept laughing at the top of her voice.

He laid her down gently on the towel. Then she stopped laughing and encircled his neck with her hands. She drew him down to her. The sun's heat was now so strong that it had already dried the sea-water on their bodies, over which the light passed rippling with each movement of their limbs.

A flock of scarlet birds flew out from the jungle and crossed the beach. They became afraid when they found themselves above the sea. They turned with a loud swish of wings and flew back into the jungle at full speed, passing over the lovers like a vast red undulating shawl.

* * *

MANY A MICKLE

A river steamer was making its way over a treacherous sand bar on the shallow Missouri. Her engines were straining, her paddle wheels churned madly, and the crew hardly dared to breathe as the vessel crept inch by inch over the bar.

A recluse living in a solitary cabin on the riverbank chose that moment to come down to the stream's edge for a pail of water. As he turned away with a brimming pail his action caught the captain's eye.

"Hey!" roared the fuming skipper. "You put that water back!"

Told by Bernard Sobel

HOME BREWED

A tavern chair is the throne of human felicity

SAMUEL JOHNSON

Every child born into the world opens its mouth to shout before it opens its eyes to see. It shouts for a drink, and it gets it. It becomes a habit . . .

ANDRÉ SIMON, *Drink*

Dream of Whiskey

I dream of whiskey
and music, O ;
the snow is falling
upon the snow ;

through fathoms of air
the snow falls down,
all over the dark
and pointed town.

I've walked a distance,
my heart is gay,
I've brought my money
to throw away ;

and it's to my own
true love I go.
with dreams of whiskey
and music, O.

JOHN LEE HIGGINS

On Further Consideration

The Persians are very fond of wine . . .

It is also their general practice to deliberate upon affairs of weight when they are drunk ; and then on the morrow, when they are sober, the decision to which they came the night before is put before them by the master of the house in which it was made ;

and if it is then approved of, they act on it ; if not, they set it aside. Sometimes, however, they are sober at their first deliberation, but in this case they always reconsider the matter under the influence of wine.

The History of Herodotus,
translated by CANON RAWLINSON

Apologia

What makes the cider blow its cork
With such a merry din?
What makes those little bubbles rise
And dance like harlequin?
It is the fatal apple, boys,
The fruit of human sin.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, *A Glee Upon Cider*

Eight Bells

Once upon a time there was an innkeeper who, strange to say, was unable to make both ends meet. Nothing that he tried was of any use . . . So in despair he consulted a wise woman.

"It is quite simple," she said, as she pocketed her fee. "You must change the name of your inn."

"But it has been *The Golden Lion* for centuries," he replied.

"You must change the name," she said. "You must call it *The Eight Bells ;* and you must have a row of seven bells as the sign."

"Seven?" he said. "But that's absurd. What will that do?"

"Go home and see," said the wise woman.

So he went home and did as she told him.

And straightway every wayfarer who was passing paused to count the bells, and then hurried into the inn to point out the mistake, each apparently believing himself to be the only one who had noticed it, and all wishing to refresh themselves for their trouble ; motorists, observing the discrepancy as they flew by, stopped their chauffeurs, and, with the usual enormous difficulty, got them to go back ; and the joke found its way into the guide-books.

The result was that the innkeeper waxed fat, lost his health and made his fortune.

E. V. LUCAS, 1868–1938, *The Uses of Criticism*

To Mend the Taste

Our wine-coopers of latter times use vast quantities of sugar and molasses to all sorts of wines, to make them drink brisk and sparkling, and to give them spirits, as also to mend their bad tastes . . .

The Art and Mystery of Vintners and Wine-Coopers, 1675

Alchemy

There is in this city a certain fraternity of chymical operators who work underground in holes, caverns and dark retirements, to conceal their mysteries from the eyes and observation of mankind. These subterraneous philosophers are daily employed in the transmigrations of liquors, and by the power of magical drugs and incantations, raise under the streets of London the choicest products of the hills and valleys of France. They can squeeze Bourdeaux out of a sloe, and draw Champagne from an apple.

JOSEPH ADDISON, *Tatler*, 1709

To Make a Sack Posset

Take twelve eggs beaten very well, and put to them a pint of Sack, stir them well that they curd not, then put to them three pints of Cream, half a pound of white Sugar, stirring them well together ; when they are hot over the fire, put them into a Bason, and set the Bason over a boiling pot of water, until the Posset be like a Custard, then take it off, and when it is cool enough to eat, serve it in with beaten Spice strewed over it very thick.

HANNAH WOOLLEY, *The Queen-like Closet*, 1672

Swish-Swash

There is a kind of swish-swash made also in Essex, and divers other places, with honeycombs and water, which the homely country wives, putting some pepper and a little other spice among, call mead, very good in mine opinion for such as love to be loose bodied at large, or a little eased of the cough.

WILLIAM HARRISON, 1534-1593, *Description of England*

Once Upon a Time . . .

Drunk for 1d.
Dead drunk for 2d.
Clean straw for nothing.

Sign at a Southward inn, 18th Century

FLEUR DE LYS

What man among them would dare to say who she was!

by F. E. ELLWOOD

AT the time the *Papillon* was due to leave Lys for Loument on its last trip of the day, I came upon Captain Dubois standing on the stone jetty by the tiny rock-strewn inlet the Lysians call their harbour. We watched the sheets of rain slashing the deck of the small steamer, and looked up at the leaden sky. Behind us and above us the cliffs towered bleakly, and mighty seas were charging over the rocks and into the caves.

"I brought you from Loument this morning, did I not, monsieur?" said the Captain. "If you care to stay the night with my wife and myself . . .?"

The kindly invitation was no surprise, for in the few hours I had spent on Lys I had discovered how amiable and—yes, feckless, these charming islanders were. In a way it was not hard to believe that they traced their descent from the pirates who lived in Lys six hundred years ago. For the pirates of Lys were no seafaring desperadoes. They just waited for nightfall, lit a welcoming beacon on the jagged spars of Boulet Rock, and their unsuspecting prey sailed right in. It was, of course, so much less trouble.

The Captain and I turned away from the harbour and climbed the steep road to the top of the cliff from where, that same morning, I had seen the whole of the tiny island spread out in the sunshine. The sea had sparkled gently on the beach below, and beyond the wilderness of gorse and heather that fringed the cliffs, placid cows had grazed contentedly, or stared idly at the passing ships curling their smoke on the horizon.

But this was Lys, island of moods and wayward charm, and the mood had changed.

At the end of the harbour road a rough path turned away to the right, past a circular hole in the cliff, edged with gorse and half overgrown with brambles. This was the *Creux de l'Echo*, the treacherous chasm descending three hundred feet through the rock to the cave below. Just beyond it Captain Dubois stopped.

"Here we are, monsieur," he said, raising his voice above the

lashing of the rain. He lifted the heavy iron latch that fastened the wooden gate. "Fleur," he shouted.

At the end of the garden path the door of the cottage opened and a woman appeared. In spite of the rain and distance I could see even then that she was beautiful, with wide-set eyes, a pointed face and a cloud of soft red hair.

We hurried up the path, and Captain Dubois began to explain my presence. "It was far too rough to take the *Papillon* to Loument," he said. "I invited monsieur to stay with us tonight."

"You are both very kind," I said gratefully.

Madame Dubois turned to me and smiled. Her eyes were dark blue, almost black. She was the most attractive woman I ever saw. "Give me your wet things," she said.

The Captain helped me remove my coat.

Henri Dubois was taller than most of the islanders, with massive shoulders, and beneath his oilskins a vast fisherman's jersey descended in rolls and folds about his enormous waist. His face, square and rugged beneath a grizzled mass of hair, was that of a man who liked to have his own way and would usually succeed. He was obviously many years older than his wife, and I wondered at this unusual marriage, and at the lonely life of this young and vividly lovely woman.

We followed Madame Dubois into the living-room, where a table was laid for tea, and a copper kettle, on the boil, perched on a two-bar over a glowing coal fire.

After tea Madame Dubois drew the curtains and made up the fire.

"How long are you staying in Loument, monsieur?" asked the Captain. "You are not, of course, of the islands?"

I told him that I was living in Paris, was working on a piece of research at the Sorbonne, and that I was at present collecting island folk lore for a thesis.

Captain Dubois puffed reflectively at his pipe. "You will have heard, then, of our Old Man of Lys?"

I had heard Gaston One-Eye mentioned in the neighbouring island, but I felt that this was a chance not to be missed. "I would be grateful," I said, "to hear the story from you."

Outside, the wind and the rain beat against the cottage walls, the trees creaked and the sea moaned in the depths of the *Creux de l'Echo*. Madame Dubois picked up her sewing, and the Captain removed a fallen coal from the hearth and told me the legend of Lys.

Nobody knows how Gaston One-Eye or his pirate band came to live on Lys.

Eight hundred years ago a wandering missionary, returning

from a visit to the Isle of Loument, stayed overnight in a French monastery and told the monks of a desolate, windswept island called Lyes, barren and deserted except by colonies of wild sea-birds.

Then two centuries pass before we hear of Lys again : a French sea-captain recording in his log that in the early dawn after a night of storm he found a Cornish sailor clinging to a piece of driftwood near the coast of Loument. The sailor told the captain that a friendly beacon had been sighted in that dark, wild night, and behind it the dim outline of a rocky coast. His captain, thinking it was Loument, made all haste for the shore, and when the storm-battered ship hit the rocks there was no defence against the swarm of devils who poured seemingly out of the cliff itself and with exultant shouts welcomed their prey.

The sailor was the only survivor. And from that day there were many disasters on the coast of Lys, but no more survivors to tell the story.

Gaston One-Eye was a powerful giant of a man with mighty arms and a rough-hewn face that might almost have been handsome but for the empty socket of his left eye and the black patch he wore to cover it. His right eye gleamed with a fierce and devilish intensity, even when he was pleased, and it may well have been the source of that mysterious and compelling power which held his followers so closely bound to him.

Out of his hearing he was also called Gaston No-Hair, because of the complete hairlessness of his head and body.

In spite of his fearsome appearance and bearing and the hardihood of the lawless life he led, Gaston was vain, and he was sensitive about his baldness. Every one of his associates knew the secret of his luxuriant curly hair, but so strong was Gaston's hold over the whole horde of villains that no one ever admitted to the knowledge that Gaston wore a wig.

A youth called Michèle was once heard to mention it, and the next day Michèle was missing. The rash young man was never seen again.

At that time there was a prosperous merchant traffic between Loument and the west French coast, and between Cornwall and the port of Bordeaux ; and the pirates of Lys, which lay directly in the route, reaped a rich and varied harvest. Copper, silver and tin from Cornwall, brandies and wines from France ; and cargoes of rice and wheat on their way to Loument.

On the wild nights of winter there would be the splintering crash of the wrecked ships, bobbing lanterns and the flash of knives, shouts and curses in the darkness, and later, the sound of a bawdy song and the bumping of crates and barrels upon the rocks.

And in the tortuous network of caves beneath the granite of

Lys the vast underground halls of rock were piled higher and yet higher with treasure and stores, while up above in their rough stone dwellings the pirates lived merrily. And the mariners who escaped the treacherous rocks of Lys would make the sign of the cross when they heard the sound of drunken singing and laughter borne on the wind.

It was Gaston's custom to reward his men with a generous share of the harvest of booty which fell so ripe and with so little trouble into the hands of the pirates. One of Gaston's personal vanities was the absolute loyalty of his followers, and he was astute enough to realize that only by a judicious liberality would his leadership be secure.

But even wealth, and carefree adventurous living, will pall in the end, and Gaston One-Eye, quick to sense a change of mood in his men, called them all together. It was a morning early in spring, the morning after the *Esperance* of Bordeaux had ground ashore on Boulet Rock.

" We have rice," said Gaston, " and grain, and fruits, and meats. And no women to prepare our feasts. It is true we have slaves, but slaves are a danger to our stronghold. We have rich silks and cloths for our couches and no women to share them. Precious jewels, and no women to adorn.

" And so tomorrow at dawn you, Prosper, will be in charge of repairing the *Esperance*. You will make it seaworthy, and at the next new moon we will sail by night to Loument."

The refitting was finished within two weeks, and on the night of the new moon Gaston and twenty of his men, bristling with arms, boarded the French ship. The wind being in the right quarter, it glided silently across the eleven miles of water that separated Loument from Lys.

The *Esperance* returned shortly before dawn, and in the grey morning light the pirates released their cargo from the hold.

It had all been very simple. The little township of Douen on the Loument coast had been quite unprepared, and the simple fishermen whose wives and daughters were snatched from them so unexpectedly had no chance against the speed and ruthlessness of this terrifying band of ruffians.

Among the women was one of great beauty and grace called Amabel. This one Gaston took for himself, and the rest he distributed amongst his followers with praiseworthy impartiality as a reward for loyalty and valour. And Gaston's prestige soared as never before.

And when the women saw the treasure piled high in the caves they began to soften towards their captors. They began, after all,

to perceive some exciting possibilities in this place of dread and terror; until in a surprisingly short time it was an effort to maintain the aloofness and air of resentment that their outraged dignity demanded.

And Lys soon began to bloom into an island paradise.

The women swept and polished, cut up the rolls of silk brought so unintentionally to Lys in the merchantmen's holds, and they made curtains and hangings for the bare stone dwellings. Wonderfully prepared meals appeared in the great dining hall, the hall built by mariner slaves whose lives Gaston had spared for the task.

And a domesticity never known before invaded the dwelling of One-Eye himself. For Amabel, in addition to being beautiful, proved to be a clever and careful housewife. Gone was the bachelor atmosphere. The rough wood furniture was draped with brocades, and vessels of gleaming silver appeared on the mantelshelf. A snowy cloth of Bordeaux lace was laid on the table, and heather and berries arranged in a copper jug.

All this was a great change in the life of One-Eye. But the greatest change of all was the one that took place in the heart of Gaston himself.

For in Gaston's heart stirred the beginnings of an emotion he had never experienced before. The pleasure it gave him to enjoy for the first time the domestic attentions of a woman, and a charming one at that, was developing into something subtler which he could not understand. It no longer satisfied him that Amabel was submissive, and worked hard for his comfort and cared for his home. In an obscure way, without admitting it to himself, he was looking for some measure of admiration from this elusive, graceful creature who was so maddeningly attractive and who stirred his blood so strangely.

And the resulting emotion was very like jealousy—jealousy of that part of herself that every woman guards in her heart and yields rarely more than once in her lifetime.

Gaston had no idea how to cope either with the situation or with his own turbulent feelings, and for the first time in his life he felt baffled and helpless in the face of a problem that action and violence would not and could not solve.

Clumsily, shamefacedly, and in the hope of pleasing her, he began to do little things for Amabel. He would search his store of treasure for the fairest jewels, for the rarest golden filigree and for the most precious of lovely fabrics. And he appointed a slave, a golden-haired youth called Nicolas, to be her servant, to carry the heavy pitchers of water from the spring, and to do the rough work.

But Gaston, inexperienced in affairs of the heart though he

was, knew only too well that he was making little progress. Amabel accepted homage as her due, and became more beautiful, more desirable, and more elusive than ever.

All this was not lost on the islanders, and by the time the winds of Autumn were blowing strong over Lys, and before that night that no one on Lys was ever to forget, Amabel was looked upon as queen of the island.

It was two hours after midnight when One-Eye and his lieutenant Prosper climbed the steep cliff path. The night's work on the beach had been disappointing, and One-Eye's own personal problem was whittling away at the back of his mind. He was tired and irritable and in no mood to talk.

The steps of the two men fell silently on the soft pine needles as they reached the head of the cliff and started along the path towards Gaston's home. High up above a racing wind was blowing, and black clouds, edged with silver, scudded across the sky. A bird cried somewhere on the beach below, and the boughs of the pine trees rustled in the wind. It was quite dark as they came over the crest of the little valley in which Gaston's house lay.

They looked down towards the little house in the hollow, expecting to find it in darkness. But there was a light shining from the window, and inside the room, against the light, a shadow. Two shadows, close together.

Gaston stopped short, and gripped Prosper's arm until he cried out with the pain.

"Quiet, fool," whispered One-Eye, and he began to creep forward, making no sound on the springy turf.

The light in the cottage suddenly went out, and at that moment the moon shone clear from behind the clouds, so that the two men could see the cottage door as it moved slowly inwards.

Gaston drew Prosper into the shadow of the tree as the slender boyish figure came stealthily out of the cottage and quietly closed the door. Gaston swore a great oath, and the youth, with a terrified glance towards the tree, raced towards the cover of gorse and heather, fair hair streaming behind him and shining bright in the moonlight.

Gaston leapt forward. Prosper, tense with excitement, stood motionless as he watched the massive avenging shape of One-Eye descend on the youth.

There was a yell of rage as Gaston seized Nicolas by his yellow hair, and in that sound the pent-up emotions that had torn One-Eye for so long were released at last. There was the flash of a long curved knife.

And that was the last—or very nearly the last—anyone saw of

Nicolas. Prosper waited long enough to see Gaston stride over to the cottage and fling open the door, and then he fled.

The following day the pirates found Nicolas in the cave at the bottom of the *Creux de l'Echo*. The body was salt-stained and shattered, for the tide had carried it out to sea and brought it back again. Hardened adventurers though they were, the men were deeply superstitious, and to find that the sea had rejected the body of Nicolas heightened the fear that Prosper's story had excited in their minds.

For several days nobody dared go near the house of One-Eye, until at last one of them, bolder than the rest, waited for the darkness and quietly made his way through the pine trees to Gaston's cottage window.

There, inside, Gaston sat alone. He was staring straight in front of him, a stone jar of rum by his side. There was no sign of Amabel.

Prosper, who had seen the death of Nicolas and the anger of One-Eye, was convinced that Gaston had slit Amabel's throat before flinging her down the *Creux*. But most of the men believed that Amabel was alive, and a prisoner in one of the island watch-towers. "Old No-Hair loved her too well," they said.

All work on the island ceased as the pirates waited for Gaston to appear or for something terrible to happen, and gradually everyone on Lys came to believe that Prosper was right, and that Amabel would be seen no more.

And so there was great surprise a few days later when the sound of a woman's voice singing was borne to them on the wind from Gaston's cottage. The voice was somehow familiar, and the men, led by Prosper, gathered quietly outside Gaston's cottage. From a respectful distance they gazed inside.

Gaston sprawled in a chair, and in his arms lay a woman they had never seen before, a lovely woman with dark skin and black hair. One-Eye was smiling down at her and playing with her curls as she sang. Prosper knocked on the door.

"Come in," said One-Eye. "Men, this is Marie." His right eye gleamed, and he spoke as if what he said called for no questions.

And there were no questions. None at all. The pirates of Lys made up their minds then and there that the woman was Marie. And for the same reason that they made up their minds about Gaston's hair.

And Amabel was never mentioned again.

Captain Dubois paused.

"Is that the end of the story?" I said. "Who was Marie? And where did she come from?"

Captain Dubois smiled. "Marie, of course, was Amabel, my dear monsieur. Can you believe that a man who had loved, loved for the first time, and loved as One-Eye did, that he could really bear to part with Amabel, for ever?"

I did not reply.

"No, no, monsieur," the Captain went on. "But you see there was his pride. His big and terrible pride. There was only one thing to do, and the great Gaston did it. Lose the fair Amabel? *Mais non*, monsieur. But keep Amabel and lose the respect of his men, the respect he so dearly valued? Still no. But *change* the beautiful Amabel, change her hair, the colour of her skin? Change this Amabel who loved him and feared him at last after the violence of that night—for Amabel was truly a woman? Why yes, monsieur, he could do that.

"And who among those men would dare to say who Marie was?"

I still said nothing. And then at last, "And what was the colour of Amabel's hair before she—well, before she became Marie?"

The Captain looked across at his wife. Madame Dubois was folding away her sewing. Her hair shone richly red in the lamplight.

"Just like that," the Captain said softly.

He rose from his chair. "A nightcap," he said, "before we go to bed. Fleur, *ma petite*, our special island punch for monsieur."

A few minutes later Madame Dubois returned with a tray and three glasses.

"A rum punch, monsieur," said the Captain. "One of the more delightful things we have inherited from our pirate ancestors."

I can hardly excuse myself for what came next. I raised my glass, and "The health of my charming hostess, your wife, monsieur," I said, "whom the fair Amabel herself could hardly have surpassed."

It was unpardonable; but I was not prepared for the strange reaction of Captain Dubois. He put down his glass and slowly, deliberately, looked first at me and then at his wife. A look of assessment, of speculation.

"Shall I show you your room, monsieur?" he said abruptly.

I said good night to Madame Dubois, and followed him upstairs.

After I had blown out the candle, I lay for a long time, unable to sleep. The unexpected undercurrents of feeling and the strangeness of the whole evening troubled me. The story of Gaston, told in its original setting. I could hear the sea even now beating against the Boulet Rock, and the moan of the water in the caves below the cottage itself.

I thought of the curious affinity between Gaston and the

Captain, between Amabel and Fleur Dubois. I remembered the Captain's words when he served the rum punch, and I could not get the thought out of my mind that somewhere there was a vital link between the past and present.

Something was missing, something that would explain the raised tension of this particular evening. I felt that in some mysterious way I myself was intimately concerned, that my presence was somehow significant. And then, with a shock, I remembered Nicolas.

My throat suddenly went dry and the hair prickled on the nape of my neck. The thought came to me that the *Creux de l'Echo* must be within sight of my bedroom window; I got out of bed and peered outside. I could see nothing through the blackness.

I felt an intense thirst, and I relit the candle. Opening the door quietly I walked across the landing. The small bedroom that had been converted into a bathroom had been on the left. I opened the door.

It was a cupboard, and on a shelf at eye level were three stands, like the ones you see in hat shop windows. On each stand was a wig. And the wigs were the same colour as the hair of Henri Dubois.

My hand shook and the flame of the candle wavered. Somehow I made my way back to the bedroom and locked the door.

I waited in that room until dawn. What it was I was waiting for I cannot be sure even now. But the dawn came at last, in a haze of mist that swirled along the ground in little eddies and tangled itself in the trees. The storm had died away. I dressed, unlocked the door and let myself out of the house. I walked down to the harbour, sat on a coil of rope on the jetty and smoked a cigarette.

Half an hour later as I was climbing up the harbour road once more, the mist was dispersing and the sun's rays were beginning to slant obliquely across the island.

Captain Dubois met me in the doorway of the cottage.

"*Bonjour*, monsieur, I hope you had a good night?" He was smiling and his voice was hearty. He looked bigger than ever. "Breakfast is ready," he said.

Madame Dubois appeared with a coffee pot and a dish of hot rolls.

"Monsieur will be able to go back to Loument by the first boat now that the storm has passed," said the Captain.

"Yes," I said, with fervent inward thankfulness.

Later that morning, standing on the bridge of the *Papillon* with Henri Dubois, I took one last look at the island.

The cliffs were dazzling in the sunlight, and the blue sea played gently around the Boulet Rock. Seagulls swooped and soared around the harbour, and a child was clambering among the rocks in search of seashells. It was all so lovely, so innocent, and I shivered in the sunshine.

* * *

SPARE THE ROD

Little Jeremy had reached that age when small boys pick up bad words and use them on every possible occasion.

He had been warned by his father that something would have to be done about it. After a particularly bad patch an invitation came for Jeremy to attend a children's party in a nearby house.

He was told that this had arrived but that as a punishment for his shocking language during the past few days he was not to be allowed to attend the party.

But so downcast and contrite was Jeremy that the father's heart was touched and he was told he would be allowed to go on condition that Mrs. Jones, the hostess, promised to send him back home the moment he was heard using bad language. His father, he was threatened, would be waiting for him and there would be a bad time in store for him when he arrived.

Came the day and the hour of departure. Little Jeremy in coat, cap and scarf was sent off to the party. In about a quarter of an hour he was banging at the front door again. Father, full of righteous indignation, let him in, would hear no explanations, but took him upstairs and dealt with him without ado, leaving his young son crying his eyes out in bed.

Jeremy's mother, as mothers will, went up shortly afterwards to see how he was doing.

"Tell Mummy all about it—what happened dear?" she soothed him.

Amidst choking sobs little Jeremy replied, "The bloody party isn't this Wednesday—it's next bloody Wednesday!"

B.T.C.

THE CONVICT AND THE CLERICS

Beyond all doubt the man whom they sped on his journey was the Bishop

by J. S. FLETCHER

TO a man who had just succeeded in escaping from prison, Brychester, in the still hours of an autumn morning, presented possibilities and opportunities which Medhurst, who had been a shrewd citizen of the world before he became a criminal, was quick to perceive and to take advantage of. Brychester itself was unique in its arrangements. One of the smallest of English cathedral cities, it was packed into very little room ; you could walk round its enclosing walls within half an hour. There were little lanes and alleys ; there were also, at the backs of the old houses and mansions, large, roomy, leafy gardens. It was in one of these, a veritable wilderness, that Medhurst hid himself about three o'clock in the morning, after breaking out of the city gaol, which stood a mile away beyond the walls.

There had been very little of actual breaking out to be done. Medhurst, recently sentenced to a considerable term of penal servitude, consigned to Brychester Gaol to await eventual delivery to Dartmoor or Portland, had kept his observant eyes wide open from the moment he exchanged his own smart apparel for the dingy, arrow-ornamented garb of the convict. He was naturally a man of resource and ingenuity and, by means of a little interference with the lock of his cell, and a watchful observation of the movements of men on night-duty, and a carefully acquired knowledge of the outer works of his prison-house, managed to get free with little difficulty. And here he was, in the earliest hours of an October day, shivering a little, but eager and ready, in the summer-house of a shady garden—wondering what to do next.

Medhurst's great immediate difficulty was that which confronts all convicts who break prison—his clothes. There was another in the lack of money, but the clothes problem was nearest and most important. Of course, if he had money, he could get away all the more easily. But clothes were the prime necessity—and he reflected that they must be good. He was a man of exceptionally good presence—a tall, well set-up, rather distinguished-looking man, as many people had observed when he stood in the dock. He felt that

he would be less conspicuous in really good attire, the use of which would be natural to him.

One fact was certain, before daybreak he must find garments wherein to get out of Brychester. For reasons into which it is not necessary to enter, Medhurst believed that his escape would not be noticed until six o'clock in the morning. He had, therefore, three hours in which to do something. And, believing that if one has something to do, one should do it at once, he moved stealthily out of his hiding-place and began to examine his surroundings.

He was able to make out that the old-fashioned garden in which he stood was one of several lying at the rear of a number of quaint-roofed houses, situated between the high walls of Brychester Cathedral —houses, in fact, tenanted by the principal ecclesiastical dignitaries. Surely, he thought, there must be some means of penetrating into one of these quiet residences, of obtaining sober and befitting raiment ?

It was very quiet, almost painfully quiet, in these cloistered shades. Once or twice Medhurst heard an owl hoot from its retreat in some ruined building on the outskirts of the city ; now and then he caught the screech of a railway whistle far off across the land ; every quarter of an hour the silvery chime of the cathedral clock rang above his head.

He climbed a wall or two, made his way through a paling or two, looked round the rearward premises of one or two houses, always careful, always watching. And suddenly, in one of the largest houses, he found an open window. It was not much open—only an inch or two—but it gave Medhurst the very chance he wanted. In another minute he had raised the sash, squeezed himself through the aperture, and dropped quietly into what appeared to be a softly carpeted passage.

Medhurst had lately spent so much time in the dark that he had learnt how to see in it. This is an accomplishment which may certainly be acquired by anyone who cares to acquire it ; all you have got to do is to wait with patience until you perceive that darkness is not quite so impenetrable as you believed it to be. Medhurst, bringing his skill to work, quickly found that he was in a wide passage which led into a hall ; in the hall he had come to a broad staircase. The carpeting of passage, hall and staircase was particularly thick and soft ; nevertheless, Medhurst sat down on the bottom steps of the staircase and took off his prison footgear. For he was going upstairs —which is where clothing is usually to be found.

Big man though he was, Medhurst went up the stairs with less noise than a cat would have made. He blessed the builder of the house ; here was no inferior wood to creak at the slightest pressure. He blessed the taste of the owner of the house, who evidently loved

velvet-pile carpets. And he was beginning to wish that he had a light when he saw one.

It was certainly not much of a light—a mere crack that shone from a slightly opened door. Medhurst tiptoed to it through a silence as deep as that which no doubt reigned in the aisles of the adjacent cathedral. He arrived at the door, and listened. He peered through the slight opening, and saw that the light came from an oil-stove, partially turned on. He had an idea that this might be a nursery, and he listened more carefully than before, trying to catch the sound of a child's faint breathing. But, as he heard no sound at all, he gently pushed open the door until he could introduce his head and shoulders. And he saw that this was a dressing-room. He hesitated, listened intently, and glided across the threshold.

Always quick to size up a situation, Medhurst saw the splendid possibilities of this as soon as he had given it one brief, all-comprehending glance. He was in the palace of the Lord Bishop of Brychester! There, duly laid out on a dressing-chest, all ready against the morning's toilet duties, were the episcopal garments—the breeches, the apron, the gaiters, the straight-cut coat. There was spotless linen, the round collar, the episcopal stock—there was everything. It was evident that the bishop, having taken his tub in the morning, had nothing to do but walk into this comfortably-warmed dressing-room and array himself in his clothes.

"Bishops, however," soliloquized Medhurst, "have doubtless several changes of clothing. At any rate, his Lordship of Brychester won't find this outfit here when he next wants it."

For Medhurst saw his opportunity, his magnificent chance. He knew the bishop by sight—his lordship had visited the gaol during Medhurst's time. In build and appearance the convict and the ecclesiastic were not unlike. Both were tall, well-made, and athletic-looking men. This would do excellently—excellently! In the darkness of the autumn morning nobody would be able to tell the false from the true during the few minutes at the railway station which would be necessary. It was a veritable interposition of Providence.

Listening carefully all the time, Medhurst swiftly stripped off his convict garb, and got into the episcopal paraphernalia. He had a little trouble with the apron, and with the gaiters, and with the stock, but he was a handy man, quick of ideas and possessed of supple fingers, and in a very few minutes he found himself properly arrayed. There was a full-length mirror on one side of the room. He caught a glimpse of himself in the half light, and he smiled complacently. But he smiled a great deal more when, turning to a dressing-table, he saw, lying upon its spotless cover, a pound note, a ten shilling note, and a little silver. He gathered the money together noiselessly, and

deposited it in the episcopal breeches, feeling heartily thankful that their owner had emptied his pockets when he went to bed. Here, again, Providence certainly seemed to be favouring him.

Medhurst now wanted nothing but these very essential things ; a muffler, an overcoat, and the Doctor of Divinity's hat which bishops always wear. These, he concluded, he would find in the hall, and he was about to set off in search of them when he suddenly caught sight of his convict's dress. It would never do to leave that about. Certainly it would come out in time—in a few hours in fact—that a convict had broken out of his gaol and into the palace, and had exchanged his clothes for the bishop's. But Medhurst desired that the knowledge should be restricted as long as possible.

Here, again, he was favoured by an inspiration and an opportunity. He saw a black handbag, inconspicuous and much worn, on the side of which was painted in faded white letters the words, "The Bishop of Brychester." He lifted this on to a chair, and opened it. Inside it he found a complete Norfolk jacket-suit of dark grey cloth, together with a cap of the same material, and certain accompaniments in the way of shirts, stockings, and ties. This, in fact, was the outfit which the bishop kept in readiness for golfing expeditions. Medhurst saw splendid possibilities in this. Without further delay he crammed his convict garb into an empty space, closed the bag, and carried it quietly down to the hall.

Here Medhurst took a risk. After remaining for some time at the foot of the stairs he ventured on striking a match. One tiny gleam of its light showed him the coat, the hat, the muffler. He put all these things on in the darkness. No sound came from above, or from around ; the house was as quiet as ever. And so, fully equipped for his journey, Medhurst sat down on a chair close to the hall door—to wait.

Medhurst knew Brychester. In his pre-criminal days he had often visited the city ; in fact, he had spent a week there just before his arrest. And he knew that an express train to London left Brychester station at ten minutes past four every morning, arriving at Victoria a few minutes before six. By that train he proposed to travel—in the character of the Lord Bishop of the Diocese. According to his reckonings nobody would stir in the palace until six o'clock; it would be some time after that before the theft of the bishop's garments was discovered. Before any hue and cry could be roused he, Medhurst, would be safe in town. All that was necessary now was to wait until the cathedral clock chimed four ; then he would let himself out, walk quietly through the Close into the little station, take his ticket, and be whirled away.

And so on the first stroke of four he quietly opened the front door, picked up the handbag, and stole quietly away across the Close

and through the deserted streets to the station. And there everything turned out even better than he had dared to hope. He had pulled down the beribboned brim of his episcopal hat; he had swathed his face up to the tip of his nose in the episcopal muffler; he had turned the collar of the episcopal overcoat up to his ears. There were few people about in the half-lighted station, and the clerk in the booking-office, and the obsequious porter who possessed himself of the handbag, and opened the door of a first-class compartment, had not a doubt that the gentleman whom they sped on his journey was the Bishop of Brychester.

As a preliminary to further operations, he searched the pockets of the appropriated garments. He found nothing in them, however, but a few cards in a well-worn case. He was not sorry to find these cards; he foresaw that they might come in useful later on.

The possession of that mufti gave Medhurst a new idea. He wanted to reach the house of an old friend in Kent, a friend whom he could fully trust, and who would certainly manage to get him secretly away to the Continent. This friend lived in a small village near Sevenoaks, a village so small that its inhabitants would certainly be excited if a bishop's apron and gaiters were seen in it. But they would not take undue notice of a gentleman in an inconspicuous Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers. Obviously, then, the thing to do was to make yet another change of attire.

When the express ran into Victoria, Medhurst seized his bag and made for a taxicab which stood not far from the point where his compartment had come to a halt. The light was of the early morning order; the chauffeur was half-asleep. He saw what he considered to be an ecclesiastical gent in leggings and a queer hat, and sprang down and opened the door.

"Go round to the Hotel Metropole," said the supposed dignitary in muffled tones. The chauffeur drove round to the hotel; his fare got out, took his bag, and spoke one word: "Wait!"

The chauffeur touched his cap, and Medhurst walked into the hall, to be welcomed by an obsequious official who knew a bishop when he saw one.

"I wish," said Medhurst, "for a room in which I can change my clothes. And perhaps you can send me some coffee up to it? I—the fact is, I am going into the country this morning to play golf, and I wish to put on more suitable attire. I shall leave my bag here, and call for it—and change my garments again—towards evening. You will, of course, charge the room to me for the day."

Half an hour later Medhurst, much more comfortable in layman's garb, walked down to the hall, intending to re-enter his cab. But with his hand on the latch, he suddenly came to a dead halt. Through the glass panel of the door, he saw the taxicab moving off.

And in it, just settling himself comfortably against the padded cushions was—a bishop!

Medhurst glanced cautiously around him. There was nobody about in the hall beyond a servant or two engaged in domestic occupations. On its stand near the window of the office reposed the register wherein guests signed their names. Medhurst went over to it, swung its heavy covers open, and found the recent entries. There, under date of the previous day, he read one line which, to him, stood out conspicuous from the rest.

"The Lord Bishop of Tunkalooka and Mrs. Sharpe-Benham."

Medhurst closed the heavy book, and turned away chuckling quietly. He understood the situation now. And he began to thank his stars that an unusually gloomy morning, a sleepy chauffeur, and the presence at the hotel of a Colonial prelate who, no doubt, wished to get to some very early service, had made his own circumstances much easier. It was with a feeling of immense satisfaction that he walked out of the hotel, and strolled off into the unwonted liberty of the streets.

The chauffeur whom Medhurst had bidden to wait outside the hotel, had given no particular attention to his fare.

He saw him go into the hotel, and he believed it was the same man who came hurriedly out of the hotel twenty minutes later, who jumped quickly into the cab, and who bade him make all haste to St. Paul's Cathedral. He had not the ghost of a notion that this was not his original fare at all, but was in reality the Bishop of Tunkalooka, a Colonial prelate, just then in England, who was due at St. Paul's at five minutes to seven o'clock, who had slightly overslept himself, and who, rushing out of his hotel, had leapt into the first vehicle he saw.

And when he set this genuine prelate down at St. Paul's, and had a better opportunity of looking at him, he still believed him to be the man he had taken up just an hour before, when the Brychester express steamed into Victoria. The Bishop of Tunkalooka glanced up at the clock of St. Paul's, and turned to the chauffeur.

"I think you had better wait for me," he said. "I shall not be here very long, and then I want to be driven elsewhere."

Even then nothing struck the chauffeur as being different. He merely glanced at the tall and athletic figure careering up the steps (Sharpe-Benham had been a noted man in the playing-fields in his ante-Colonial days), lighted his pipe, purchased a morning paper from a passing itinerant, and settled himself down in his seat until the bishop had finished his business or his devotions. He was still reading the latest racing news when, forty minutes later, the bishop emerged from the cathedral in company with another clergyman. The other clergyman, as they came up to the cab, made some

facetious remark about the wickedness of keeping taxicabs waiting while the meters ran on unchecked.

"I know—I know," said the bishop. "But the fact is, I am obliged to drive some distance into the East End, and this cab is so good and comfortable that I decided to keep it."

The other clergyman laughed, shook hands, and went off in the direction of the deanery, and the bishop turned to the chauffeur.

"I want you," he said, "to drive me to St. Hedwige's Church at East Ham. That's a long way, isn't it?"

The chauffeur folded up his newspaper, and crammed it into his pocket.

"Pretty tidy way that, sir," he answered. "Whereabout is this church, sir?"

"That we must find out when we get to East Ham," said the bishop. "But—I think I must have some breakfast before I go so far." He paused, gazing wistfully around him at the tall buildings. "I suppose there is no restaurant or anything of that sort about here?" he asked.

"Cannon Street Station Hotel just round the corner, sir," suggested the chauffeur. "Get breakfast there, sir."

The chauffeur drove along to Cannon Street station, pointed out the hotel entrance to his fare, and prepared to do more waiting. The bishop, who was a man of kindly nature, looked at his driver thoughtfully.

"Perhaps you, too, would like to breakfast?" he said. "If so, pray do. I suppose I shall be three-quarters of an hour, at any rate."

"Thank you, sir," said the chauffeur. He glanced at the clock and saw that eight was about to strike. "I'll be back here at twenty to nine, sir," he went on. "Ain't had no breakfast meself yet!" he added, with a grin.

The bishop smiled, nodded, and walked into the hotel. He was shown into the coffee-room with the politeness due to his dignity. He ordered his food, he asked for a newspaper, he settled himself quietly and comfortably to his breakfast, and took his time over it. The waiter who attended to him had given him a seat near the fire; the bishop, satisfied with his own immediate affairs, did not pay any attention to the other people in the room. And he certainly did not observe a rather large, official-faced sort of person who came quietly in, and, under cover of a general look round, contrived to eye him, the bishop, with a searching inspection.

At a quarter to nine the bishop laid aside the newspaper on one hand, and his napkin on the other, and inserted his fingers in the pocket wherein he usually carried his ready cash. To his horror he found that there was no cash there. He hastily felt for his pocket-book, in which he kept a banknote or two in readiness for possible

emergencies. But his pocket was empty—all his pockets were empty. Then he suddenly remembered that, in the hurry incident upon his belated arising that morning, he had left his loose cash, his purse, his pocket-book, all his trifles, on his dressing-table. It was awkward, but it was no great matter, after all. He summoned the head-waiter, who came forward with a respectful presentation of the bill.

"I am sorry, but I have left my purse and all my belongings at the Hotel Metropole where I am staying," said the bishop. "I left there very hastily this morning to keep an appointment at St. Paul's. But I have a taxi-cab waiting for me downstairs, and I will send the driver at once to fetch my purse."

The head-waiter replied that that would be quite all right, and the bishop walked out of the room, a little vexed with himself for having slept ten minutes over his time. He went downstairs, and was about to step into the station, where he saw the taxicab awaiting him, when the official-faced person who had eyed him from the door of the coffee-room, and who had exchanged a word or two with the head-waiter when the bishop walked out, came up from behind, and stopped him with a polite but frigid bow.

"May I have a word with you, sir?" he asked.

The bishop turned in surprise. There was a note of firmness in the man's voice which converted the request into something very like a command. The bishop, a man of spirit, felt his face flush a little.

"You wish to speak to me?" he said.

"If you please," replied the man. He indicated the door of a side-room, and bowed the bishop within. "I am sorry," he continued, in the same firm and frigid tone; "I understand your bill is not paid?"

The bishop's first flush changed to something more vivid.

"Really!" he exclaimed. "This is—" But there he pulled himself up; after all, the fault was his own. "I have just explained to your head-waiter that I am sending for my purse," he continued. "I left it on my dressing-table, being in a hurry this morning. I have a taxicab outside—the driver will fetch what I want."

The official-faced person still seemed very firm. He glanced at the episcopal apron.

"You are the Bishop of—" he began.

"I am the Bishop of Tunkalooka," answered the captive, with some asperity.

"Where is that?" demanded the inquisitor, more firmly than ever.

"Really, really!" exclaimed the bishop. "This is—my good man, do you really suggest that—"

"I suggest nothing," replied the other. "I am merely asking for

information. You come here, run up a bill, leave without paying it, and—to be plain—I may as well tell you that I am a police officer. The fact of the case is," he went on, as another formidable-looking person entered the room, "the fact of the case is, the palace of the Bishop of Brychester was broken into early this morning by an escaped convict, who is believed to have got away by the four o'clock train from Brychester in the bishop's clothes. Now you answer the description of that convict."

The bishop felt as if he were suddenly deprived of speech. Just as suddenly he laughed.

"My good sir!" he exclaimed. "This is ridiculous! Utterly ridiculous! I am the Bishop of Tunkalooka, which is in Canada. I am at present staying at the Hotel Metropole; I have just come up from St. Paul's Cathedral, where I am well known to many members of the Chapter. The chauffeur outside will tell you that he has just driven me from the Hotel Metropole, and—"

The first man made a sign to the second, who left the room, and instantly returned with the driver of the taxicab. The first man directed the driver's attention to the bishop.

"Where did you drive this gentleman from?" he asked peremptorily.

The driver glanced at all three with signs of rising suspicion.

"Well, from St. Paul's last," he answered, "and before that from the Hotel Metropole, and before that from Victoria station!"

The bishop started.

"From Victoria station!" he exclaimed. "My good fellow, you did not drive me from Victoria station! You drove me—"

The driver became actively suspicious; so far he had not seen the colour of the bishop's money. Besides, he had waited twenty minutes outside the hotel.

"Ho, didn't I!" he exclaimed. "I suppose I didn't drive you round from Victoria to the Metropole, did I, where I waited twenty minutes for yer? Oh, no!" He made a derisive face, seeing how things were going, and turned to the two men.

"He came into Victoria by the Brychester express," he continued. "That what gets in just afore six—course he did!"

The detectives closed in upon the unhappy bishop. There was no doubt in their minds that they had effected a smart, if lucky capture. And it was only in accordance with the nature of things that they convoyed their captive there and then to the nearest police station.

Medhurst strolled away from the hotel towards Victoria Street, thinking. His next move, he reflected, ought to be towards definite liberty. The first thing to do was to get to his trusty friend. And he

suddenly remembered that the trusty friend had an office in London, close to the Mansion House. Why not go there instead of running the risk of a railway journey into Kent?

Medhurst accordingly made for the City. He turned into the Underground Railway, and took a ticket for the Mansion House. Amongst the early crowd of men going to shops and offices he would feel himself safe; however anxious to recapture him the police might be, they could not set patrols in every street of London. He would stroll about the City until nine o'clock or so, when his friend would be likely to put in an appearance.

In the Underground train Medhurst made an interesting discovery. In the breast-pocket of the Norfolk jacket he found a cigar case. There were four uncommonly fine cigars in it—he at once lighted one, with the keen zest and enjoyment of a man who had not tasted tobacco for long, weary weeks. But, as he was examining the case, before restoring it to his pocket, he found something else. In a slip-pocket, obviously designed to carry stamps or similar small articles, he found a couple of blank cheques of the Brychester and County Bank. Their lawful owner, the bishop, was evidently a careful man, who provided for unforeseen contingencies; anybody, of course, will cash a cheque for a bishop.

Medhurst laughed over his discovery. It was, however, of no particular interest to him just then, and he put the cheques back in their place, and the cigar case in his pocket, and smoked in great contentment until he came to the Mansion House station. There he got out and went up into the streets, which were already beginning to be busy.

It was immaterial to him where he went for the next hour or so; but he took good care always to be moving, as if with a purpose. He went along by the Bank, and round by the Guildhall, and into Aldersgate, and through various small streets into Smithfield; there he turned south, and made his way into Ludgate Hill. And loafing about there he paused to gaze into the window of a bookseller's shop, and before he was aware of it he found himself staring at a book which stood with title-page and frontispiece exposed, on a shelf immediately in front of him. The title-page conveyed the information that this was a work on Athletics and Christianity, by the Lord Bishop of Brychester; the frontispiece was a photogravure of the right reverend author. And underneath it was a facsimile of the bishop's signature.

Medhurst was a man of rapid thought, and he saw a fine opportunity immediately before him. In his pocket reposed two of the Bishop of Brychester's blank cheques, there before him was a very good reproduction of the bishop's autograph. A rare opportunity, indeed; for Medhurst was an expert imitator of other people's

handwriting. That, indeed, was why he had come into contact with the law.

Medhurst walked into the shop, fingering his loose change. His keen sense of humour made him smile as he bought the bishop's book with the bishop's own money. It was a small, thin, genteel book—merely a reprint of two or three lectures given to young men—and he slipped it into his outer pocket and went away. Medhurst now had a task to perform, an adventure to undertake, before he went to his friend—he was going to make use of his criminal facility of imitating penmanship.

He turned into a teashop at last, and ordered a light breakfast. While it was being brought to him he carefully studied the facsimile of the Bishop of Brychester's signature. It was an easy signature to imitate; it was not the writing of a literary man, nor of a scholar, but rather of a business-like, straightforward sort, without twirls, flourishes, or elongated downstrokes. By the time Medhurst had finished his simple breakfast he knew that handwriting so well, had so photographed it on his brain, that he had no fear of being able to write out a cheque in such accurate imitation of it that the bishop himself would be puzzled in detecting the forgery.

Medhurst went straight to business. He had already thought of a well-known jeweller's shop in Cheapside where he could do what he wanted; it had the great advantage of being practically next door to the block of buildings into which he meant to disappear as soon as his proposed transaction was safely over.

He entered the jeweller's shop with all the assurance in the world, and was politely greeted by a manager who, seeing a soberly attired gentleman in a clerical collar, set his customer down as a country parson who had come to town in his rustic garb. But Medhurst quickly disabused the manager of that impression. Drawing out the well-worn card-case, he laid one of the Bishop of Brychester's cards on the glass-topped counter. The manager bowed again, more politely than before, and gave his episcopal visitor a seat.

"I have frequently seen your watches advertised," said the supposed bishop, "and, as I have a little time to spare before going into the country to play golf, I thought I would call and inspect them. The fact is, I want to make a present to my domestic chaplain, who has just been preferred to a living, and I think a good watch—gold, of course—would be the best thing I could give him. As I say, I have noticed your advertisements in the newspapers. I believe you have a very good keyless hunter-watch at about—something under forty pounds?"

The manager hastened to lay before his customer a variety of gold watches of many prices. Medhurst examined them with interest and with care, talking pleasantly all the time. Eventually he

selected an elegant and useful article which was priced at thirty-three guineas. And upon that he produced one of the blank cheques. "I will make out this cheque for fifty pounds," he remarked as the manager handed him writing materials. "Perhaps you can give me change?".

"With pleasure, my lord," responded the manager. He had no doubt of his visitor's identity. Had he not received the bishop's card? Was there not lying there beside the bishop's gloves a copy of a book *Athletics and Christianity*, with the bishop's name upon it? He handed over fifteen pounds and seven shillings, and thanked his supposed lordship for his custom.

Medhurst made his most dignified bow, and put on his blandest smile. He glanced at a timepiece hanging behind the counter, and began to hurry.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I have left myself little time to catch my train at Cannon Street. I must hasten."

The manager swept round the counter, and opened the door with a deep reverence.

"Just round the corner, my lord," he said. "Your lordship will do it in five minutes."

Medhurst smiled and nodded, and passed swiftly out. He certainly went round the corner which the manager indicated. Then he went round another corner, and round another. And then he plunged into a block of buildings contrived on the principle of a rabbit-warren. Within five minutes of leaving the jeweller's shop he was in the private office of the trusty friend, who had just admitted himself, and now made great haste to lock the door on both of them.

Meanwhile the jeweller's manager, having watched the supposed bishop round the corner, went back into the shop, rubbing his hands with satisfaction at having started the day so well.

Suddenly he caught sight of the book and the gloves—entirely forgotten by Medhurst—which still lay on the counter. He snatched them up, shouted a word to his assistants, and ran after the customer. He careered down Bucklersbury, he shot across Queen Victoria Street, he raced along Walbrook, he made a perilous dash over Cannon Street and into the station. He was almost breathless when he ran up to the barrier of the departure platform, staring about him.

"Have you seen a bishop pass in?" he panted as he approached the ticket-puncher. "Tall gentleman—Bishop of Brychester!"

The ticket-puncher gave the jeweller's manager a glance.

"There was a party rigged out as the Bishop of Brychester arrested here this morning!" he growled. "Bilked the 'otel, he did. Stuffed himself, and had nothing to pay with—that's what 'e done! D'yer want 'im? 'Cause you'll find him round at the p'leece station."

The jeweller's manager suddenly felt very ill. His head swam. He walked away. Then he recovered just as suddenly. The bilker could not be the same man who had just visited him—impossible! Still, it would not be out of his way to visit the police station. He knew some of the officials there, and he went off to them and told his story. What he wanted to know was—how did this extraordinary coincidence come about!

The police official to whom the manager told his story listened in silence—in silence he remained for some minutes.

"Happened just now?" he suddenly asked.

"Within half an hour," answered the manager. He smiled bravely. "Of course," he said, "mine was the real bishop. But—who's your man—who's the impostor?"

The official crooked his finger.

"Come this way," he said.

He led the manager to a certain stronghold, wherein the unhappy Bishop of Tunkalooka was still expostulating with his incredulous guardians. But even as they entered it by one door, there was ushered in at another a very great ecclesiastical dignitary, as familiar in the City as St. Paul's itself, at sight of whom everybody in the room became profoundly respectful.

He advanced upon the Colonial prelate with outstretched hands.

"My dear bishop!" he exclaimed. "What a lamentable—what a ridiculous mistake! What an unfortunate—"

The police official who had conducted the jeweller's manager into the room suddenly swept him out of it.

"Quick—quick!" he said. "Come and describe that fellow you've told me about! That's the real man! We must be on to him sharp! Come on! Where did you say he was off to? But, of course, he hasn't gone there—not he!"

In that the police official was quite right. At that moment Medhurst, who had already effected another change of clothes, was being quietly carried away to a reasonable prospect of ultimate liberty.

* * *

IN TRIPLICATE

A regional supervisor of British Railways received the following note from one of his track foremen:

"I am sending you the accident report on Casey's foot, when he struck it with an adze. By the way, under the section 'Remarks' did you want mine or Casey's?"

PROMENADE

**From revel-rout to honour-your-partner,
and home with the milk!**

Grotesque

Playing upon the hill three centaurs were !
They lifted each a hoof ! They stared at me !
And stamped the dust !

They stamped the dust ! They snuffed upon the air
And all their movements had the fierce glee
Of power, and pride, and lust !

Of power and pride and lust ! Then, with a shout,
They tossed their heads, and wheeled, and galloped
round,
In furious brotherhood !

In furious brotherhood ! Around, about,
They charged, they swerved, they leaped !
Then bound on bound,
They raced into the wood !

JAMES STEPHENS

Can-Can At The Moulin Rouge

Above all, there was the dancing of the *can-can*, with the strange, forbidding figure of Valentin, hollow-eyed, hollow-cheeked, his flat-brimmed, tall hat and tight wrinkled trousers ; and La Goulue, Nini Pattes-on-l'air, and Rayon d'Or.

In most places dancers performed on a stage ; at the Moulin they mixed with the crowd, or sat at tables and drank with admirers and friends. Then suddenly the band would strike up, and they formed a set in the middle of the floor, while a crowd gathered closely round them. It was a strange dance ; a sort of quadrille, with Valentin and the other men twisting their legs into uncouth shapes, making gross gestures with hands and arms opposite their partners in the attitude of Vishnu, one leg on the ground, the other raised almost vertically, previous to the sudden descent—*le grand écart.*

SIR WILLIAM ROTHENSTEIN, *Men and Memories*

Ballerina

Your hands have rituals as old as springtime.
Your hands are birds, climbing the stairs of air.
Your hands are silver flying fish escaping
From what faint shadow of what threatening,
where?

A. S. J. TESSIMOND

Needle's Eye

Dancing is for the most part attended with many amorous smiles, wanton compliments, unchaste kisses, scurrilous songs and sonnets, effeminate music, lust-provoking attire, ridiculous love-pranks; all which savour only of sensuality, of raging fleshly lusts. Therefore it is wholly to be abandoned of all good Christians. Dancing serves no necessary use, no profitable, laudable, or pious end at all; it issues only from the inbred pravity, vanity, wantonness, incontinency, pride, profaneness, or madness of men's depraved natures. Therefore it must needs be unlawful unto Christians. The way to heaven is too steep, too narrow, for men to dance in and keep revel-rout: No way is large or smooth enough for capering roisters, for jumping, skipping dancing dames, but that broad, beaten, pleasant road that leads to hell. The gate of heaven is too narrow for whole rounds, whole troops, of dancers to march in together: Men never went as yet by multitudes, much less by morrice-dancing troops, to heaven: Alas, they scarce go two together; and these few, what are they? Not dancers, but mourners, whose tune is *Lachrymæ;* whose music is sighs for sin; who know no other Cinque-pace but this to heaven; to go mourning all the day long for their iniquities; to mourn in secret like doves; to chatter like cranes for their own and others' sins . . .

WILLIAM PRYNNE, 1600–1669, *Histriomastix*

Square Dance

Take your honey by the waist
And swing her round and round!
Then you swing your corner,
You whirl her off the ground.
Back to your partner, do-se-do,
Do-se-do and away you go.
Circle right and circle left,
You're up before you're down.
Now parade your lady,
Parade her round the town!

BABETTE DEUTSCH

Hawks and Stars

This girl was brought to the Blue tavern by Sugar-of-Roses. She might have been the moon of the world's dancers, if she had not felt so much, and if she had not liked her wine heavy and spiced with cloves. When she had got enough of this at our hands, she would lead us to a room behind the courtyard, and there, to her friend's lute playing, and in the light of a single lamp, reward us with glories . . .

Selma always threw off her clothes in a far corner, and danced the same two dances, of hawks and of stars. In the first she seems to float on the flushed wings of her arms, the hands dropping a little. Her pale feet make steps so small, even, and swift that the wide pathways on which she glides, appear to owe nothing to them. But soon her mate drops like a plummet from the mountains; they meet and grip in a flurry of feathers, now rising and now falling. Presently she breaks free and slips down the invisible roads again, onward and alone . . . Then with one straight flash of her body she seeks the shadow of the room.

But in the dance of the stars she will not treat things so majestical too solemnly. Her star is a twinkling silver wild-fire, gay and impermanent. With a weaving and flickering of her whole body she spins upon her track, laughing and gleaming, so that her feet and arms and hair are one light. When it is breathless and can no more shine, the stars falls.

E. POWYS MATHERS, *Red Wise*

Under the Mistletoe

Sitting under the mistletoe
(Pale-green, fairy mistletoe,)
One last candle burning low,
All the sleepy dancers gone,
Just one candle burning on,
Shadows lurking everywhere :
Some one came, and kissed me there.

Tired I was ; my head would go
Nodding under the mistletoe
(Pale-green, fairy mistletoe,)
No footsteps came, no voice, but only,
Just as I sat there, sleepy, lonely,
Stooped in the still and shadowy air
Lips unseen—and kissed me there.

WALTER DE LA MARE

JUNGLE DEBT

Like angry shadows, they advanced in a relentless, primitive hunt for revenge

by FRANK STUART

THROUGH the everlasting distances of the trees, crying through the jungle night, the shrill trumpeting quivered and echoed on and on.

Up in the branches, the monkeys glanced nervously at one another and scratched themselves and muttered angrily and uneasily at being disturbed. Sliding like a shadow round the edges of the pools of silver moonlight, the panther licked his lips, sheering away from that screaming as though it menaced him, snarling over his shoulder at it as he went. Two antelopes that were trotting down towards the river to drink, stopped with lifted heads. They were thirsty, but they turned meekly away from the cool smell of water and padded away through the fallen leaves.

Night in the Indian jungle is filled with living sounds and voices, movements and scents and passings; but the moment the sobbing trumpeting began, they stopped. Down to the river every night, thousands upon thousands of wild things go to drink. But now the parched creatures stopped with raised foot and quivering ear, then turned away; the sleeping things woke to danger, shivered, crouched, and slept again with every nerve taut in case that trumpeting came nearer.

The vast moon silently sailing illumined in fatal white the glade by the river's edge whence the sound came. A female elephant stood near the rushes by the water. She was nearly ten feet high, with white tusks gleaming, and she swayed from side to side, uttering a continuous and monotonous trumpeting of grief. Under her lay the bloody and mangled body of her calf, with one furry side ripped and entrails protruding.

Five minutes earlier, it had been playing in the mud. The mother had wandered away, plucking at fruits and sweet young leaves. No sound of danger or death had come to her ears. She had come back, vaguely alarmed because she could not hear her calf moving about. It was dead. From the other side of the glade, a statue of Buddha, one arm broken away, looked down in passionless

calm, the moonlight silvering that beautiful, chiselled face.

Through the eternity of black trunks along the riverside came a sudden avalanche of deeper darkness, panting and grunting—Bimbisara, lord of the herd, and behind him Junt, the young bull, not quite as tall as his father's rump, not sure enough yet of himself to face the jungle and seek his mate. Bimbisara's small eyes glanced at the dead calf, and at the swaying mountain of Lana, his mate, crying out her grief. He and his son galloped up to her.

Bimbisara, over eleven feet high, weighing eight tons, was feeling for scent with his trunk horizontal in front of him, its finger-end opened, his ten-foot tusks lifted, his ears fully extended and flickering slightly at the tips. Seeing him listening, Lana stopped trumpeting. She stood frozen, her reddened small eyes glassy with hate. Behind Bimbisara, his son, shoulder to his heaving flank, copied every movement. He listened, too.

Hundreds of messages entered those enormous ears. The feet of hunters and hunted drummed the ground, the little loitering feet of the timid ones hardly stirring the leafmould, the passage of hairy shoulders through walls of leaves, the breathing of the wind, the swift slithering of snakes, the lapping of water up and downstream, the stirring of scaly crocodiles, the sliding whirr of birds. This was the jungle night, the killing and the being killed, the panting of pursuit and the sobbing of the creatures run down, the stealthy stirring and the nervous flight. To that quivering trunk came scents and odours, rank and sweet and dull and sour and sharp, animal and vegetable, living and decaying.

The scent of the Killer was not there. Hot and foul it lay across the murdered carcass of the elephant calf, stinking it ran down into the water of the careless river as it babbled its night song. There it ended. To the three elephants, the moonlit world was full of tiger, but there was no tiger there.

With a smash of anger, Bimbisara brought down his forefoot on the swampy ground; then trunk and head quivered as he yelled out an uncontrollable scream of rage. Lana was silent. She lowered the one-fingered tip of her trunk to the rip on her baby's side, touched it with loathing, and turned away.

The elephants quarrel with no one. They do not hunt flesh, and no animal hunts them. Playing in their muddy rivers, pulling down tender tips from young tall branches, lying in dappled sunlight or in deep swampy green shade, they live their lives as long as men's lives, more harmless and, perhaps, more happy. Some vague sense of the wanton cruelty of the tiger stirred in those prehistoric brains. Killing is part of life, so every jungle being knows; but those who kill elephant calves for the lust of feeling

flesh shrink and hearing life go whistling away must face what comes after.

The three elephants began a strange, purposeful journey. With the old bull in the lead, and Lana and Junt crowding behind him, they lurched steadily along the river bank. They did not feed. They did not drink. At times, guided by some instinct moving in his raging little brain, Bimbisara froze into immobility, lifted his trunk straight out in front of him, and felt and smelt and listened. Sometimes the others copied him. Sometimes they waited, ears back, trunks pendent, prepared to attack.

As the three thudded along by the river, every sort of creature gave them way. Those who were drinking hastily backed out and slunk into the darkness under the trees. Those who were hunting shrank down to earth and waited—even if a quarry were almost run to death. Lives were saved that night as sobbing, limping things slipped across in front of the three dark gods of the forests—and found suddenly that pursuit had stopped behind.

Once, Lana smelt and simultaneously sighted the striped flicker of a tiger, low down, slinking; she froze, ears down, trunk curling up out of the way ready for battle. But Bimbisara only grunted and stepped impatiently on. This was not the tiger. It was, in fact, the tiger's mate, but justice in the jungle is like the law of God; it does not strike at any but the guilty.

After travelling two or three miles upstream, Bimbisara turned and the elephants began to move like three dark ships back on their tracks. Tufts of high grasses swept by their sides; branches swished along their backs; tough vines clutched round their lifting feet; the moonlight sailed in and out of the glades; sometimes the three mountainous beasts drifted along silently like fallen clouds; sometimes there was a crackle or a creak; night birds banked aside on stiffened wings to avoid them; prowling beasts waited to let them pass. For the jungle knows when the elephants are on the death-trail; the night is theirs then, and for fifty feet on each side of the way they go, all life shrinks out of reach.

Bimbisara did not hurry in that night search. His thick legs moved as steadily as pistons, six feet to a stride; mile after mile of forest was covered, questing for the particular tiger stench that had risen from the body of the little calf. Red pig-eyes searched the black and silver avenues through the trees, or penetrated ferociously the tangles of jungle creeper; ears like sails lifted and flapped and fell; the accusing trunk was outflung this way or that, feeling at the gentle edges of the breeze that was sweet with the smell of tropical decay and the teeming life it breeds.

Sometimes the twelve thudding feet squelched down into mud, and sucked and clucked as they came out. Sometimes matted

masses of creepers caught on tusk or head, and were impatiently ploughed aside. Young trees carelessly thrust aside by those mighty shoulders slapped back with a snapping of small branches against unheeding leathern sides caked with dried mud.

But the tiger who had seen the playful little calf in the rushes, who had paused with curving claws upraised, who had noiselessly rolled back his lips, grinning, and felt the red delight of killing spreading through his veins and tickling every inch of his sliding skin, the tiger who had hesitated like an epicure, watching the baby elephant play in the mud—and had projected himself like a streak of barred light and caught his long teeth in that pulsing throat and torn it out before there was time for a cry of pain, and who had buried his smoking muzzle in the flesh that cringed so deliciously from the searing pain, the tiger that had nosed and licked twisted entrails out of the opened side . . . he had gone.

He had slipped and melted and oozed into the jungle that bred him, where he had been lord of terror for so long that his nose was turning grey. He had contemptuously walked in the deep water of the careless singing river, in the moonlight, where the rush of the stream was so strong that it almost sucked him off his padded feet; and he delighted in the ripple of the water through his fur and the cold lift and buffet of it; and he licked his snout to remember the smoke of blood, young blood, sweet and hot and frightened; and he waded on, glad at having killed something small, and snarling at the thought of the parent elephants finding what he had left spread among the green reeds.

Presently, he came out of the water. He turned back, tail swishing, and put his bearded face down to the water for a drink. Blood was thick and sweet. Blood was salt and trickled hot. He drank, lifted his head to roar, lowered that pitiless head in silence, and stood lashing his tail with rage. Instinct told him to be still. Desire told him to cry out his triumph. But he did not roar. The elephants are not mocked.

Almost silently, he stole along a narrow jungle trail, through creepers with great white flowers, across fallen logs, towards the hillside cave that was his lair. His mate would be there. The ecstasy of killing had faded. He was sullenly angry. Knowledge of danger had not permitted him to eat more than a mouthful or two of the elephant calf's flesh, though he had drunk some of the blood. It was not enough. He was hungry. And afraid.

Wild animals do not think, but sensations pass like light and shadow through their brains. This tiger was afraid. His stomach sank and he silently rolled back his lips over yellowed fangs, and

his bearded head looked silkily about through the darkness under the trees, and the whiskers at his muzzle quivered. But he was not much afraid; he had not eaten heavily or drunk much; he was not heavy or slow. He could fight. He stretched his ten-foot length from nose to tail-tuft, yawned, and slunk on his way. There was nothing that lived that he could not kill.

Suddenly his head came up. He smelled smoke.

Among the thousand messages of the night air, there was one, infinitely faint and small, but insistent, red and urgent. Smoke. The tiger's white cheeks, and the big white spot over each eye, glinted in the moonlight. There was no sound of fire, no whisper; but there had been that faint tang of bitterness, of sharpness. Of death. Among all animals, though there are many feuds and terrors, though some kill others for food, one enemy with dread sovereignty sets aside all lesser claims. Fire, the smell and sound and sight of fire, suspends all jungle thoughts.

This tiger knew that death, vast, dark and pitiless, was somewhere behind him. Now, stinging and bitter, more cruel than teeth or claws or tusks or trampling elephant hooves and knees, death was also in front. Piercing death. Scorching death.

The tiger stood, with lashing tail, snarling at the faint whiff that had gone now. It had gone. But smoke does not come alone. Once more the terrifying taint, fainter than any breath, tangled in the smells of pigs and marigolds and mud and monkeys and decay and parrots and young leaves and water and flowers and warmth and mystery and night. And was gone.

The tiger turned irresolutely, facing back. There was no sound of any pursuer, yet he knew that the pursuers were there, coming steadily, far out of keenest earshot, out of smell and sight, far away, but coming nearer. Opening his red mouth, the tiger sent out a bubbling, low growl, horrible to hear.

Then he bounded sideways and began to lope fast between rushing grasses and speeding black trunks, trying to escape between the invisible fire and the invisible elephants. Trying, too, to edge a little round towards his lair. Towards his mate.

He ran economically, bounding silkily, flowing almost, a figure of molten rufous fawn and black, loose and long and easy. And as he ran, he listened and smelt and glanced; and now again and stronger came the sourish fume of the smoke over his left shoulder, cold still, but this time strong.

As it struck his senses, he bounded as if he had received a blow, smashing through tall grass clusters across an open glade. And as he sailed through the air in that great, frightened bound, some other sense than smell or sight or hearing told him again that the elephants were away through the moonlit jungle on his

right. Far away; but there; running steadily, parallel with him; turning, perhaps, in towards him. Snarling, he ran on. A confusion in his brain mixed the thoughts of his mate ahead, of elephants trampling like doom, of fire bright and red. He ran growling.

There came over his left shoulder a puff of faintly warm tanging air. Warm. Running, he made too much noise to hear, but he knew that if he could stop and listen, he might already notice the first distant cracks and the first vague murmur of the forest fire. Every fibre in that gleaming body wanted to turn to the right, and run, run, run away from the smoke. But to the right were the elephants, stamping and crashing. He could not hear them, but he knew. He had killed their baby calf, and elephants are like doom.

The tiger that had been loping so easily was bounding now. Speed. What speed he had in that suave body, in those long, slipping muscles and sinews sliding under the loose barred fur. Catlike, in splendid leaps, he cleared obstacles; his padded feet barely touched the ground as he ran, ran through the silence that was beginning to come alive with a distant booming, shot with sharp smacks and licks and hungry whispers of fire. The moonlight was fading, though the moon stood high and silver-lovely above the trees; it was fading because, over on the left, there was a redness and a sultry thickness staining the night sky, outlining the mop tops of the trees clung about with creeper ropes.

The tiger stopped. Foam dropped from the edge of his jaws. His tongue shot over his lips. He could not bear fear any more. Now he was still, the sound of the jungle conflagration was plainly audible, a roaring, low and distant, but coming—coming. He *had* to go to the right. There was no sound from the right. Only a shadow, not visible to the eyes; only a presence that could not yet be seen; only death, waiting and curious and still.

But the tiger bore off at a tangent to the right, galloping, streaking through the trees.

His senses told him other creatures were running that way, not at a tangent but straight down to the river. All the forest was full of an exodus of animals and birds. Insects were helplessly hopping and jumping and crawling and flying towards the river, and across the line of their flight, the tiger ran, growling, panting, struggling not to go down with them, but to outrun them all, by pursuing a swift course at an angle across the way they were running.

He never supposed that the elephants would run away from the fire. Hope is not an emotion jungle creatures feel. They know only facts. The tiger knew that whenever he turned riverwards, the elephants would be there. The cow elephant would be there. The others might fear the fire, but she would be there. He had no remorse, no sorrow, as he ran panting through trees that were

faintly reddening now. Only knowledge. She would be there.

But instead of running straight at a diagonal across the line of flight of the thousands of birds and beasts that were moving riverwards, the tiger was turning in a big circle. The fire was turning him towards the river. The tiger could fight. Running, panting, his body thrilled and his muscles flickered and his eyes grew hot and he slavered from his dry mouth as he felt fight rise in him. But he could not fight fire. Fire is master of all.

So—at last—he turned full to the river and ran slinkily and easily and swiftly to meet what waited him there.

There were other animals running beside him. For this hour, the law of hunter and hunted was annulled. Over smooth-running shoulders, the tiger saw antelopes and bison, keeping away from him in their terrified race for the river, but not turning headlong in flight as they would have done at other times; nor did he turn aside towards them, but ran on and on. Monkeys poured through the trees. Birds were flying, crying, squawking, making the night hideous with their frightened cries, many of them day birds awakened to the smell of smoke and the reddening warmth of the sky.

Destiny, so often—or, perhaps, always?—perfectly apposite, brought the converging lines of the elephants and the tiger together in the same glade by the riverside where startled jackals slunk back in terror from the torn remains of the elephant calf, which they had now ripped to pieces. As the tiger bounded past the knee of the broken Buddha, Bimbisara crashed out of the trees beside the river, his fierce pig eyes turned straight at the oncoming fire from which the tiger was fleeing.

For a moment, the animals froze into sculpture as motionless as the seated figure itself—three elephants with ears back and trunks hanging, the tiger facing them, crouching low, the fire glowing on his burnished and splendid flanks. Then Bimbisara rolled up his trunk, stuck out his tufted tail quivering, lowered his tusks and charged, trumpeting; and like a flash of redder light, the tiger sprang.

He grasped, with his talons curved like skinning-knives, at the elephant's massive forehead, twisting in air to miss the up-raking tusks, and before his hind paws had dropped to grip Bimbisara's face, the front claws were making that frightful drawing scrape intended to rake out the elephant's eyes.

Thirty years before, Bimbisara had fought a tiger; his shoulder was scarred and his side wrinkled with the marks of it; but the tiger had gone down into the earth with the maddened elephant's hooves pounding on top of him. Now, with an identical flick of the head instantly remembered, Bimbisara butted the huge, hissing

ball of fur to one side, and with a frightful grunt, curling up and rolling in mid-air to present only stabbing talons and teeth, the tiger hit the ground and bounced, it seemed, several yards away, on to its feet, spitting and arching its back for the next leap.

When Bimbisara had charged across the glade, Lana, his mate, took an irresolute step after him, but Junt, the young bull, hung back, terror palpitating his caked sides. He wanted to turn and run away—away into the dark safe depths of the forest. For some time, he had been uttering grunts of fear and warning, sniffing at the hot, smoke-soured air, flapping his ears and nervously lifting his trunk. Then, with trails of smoke, this fire-coloured flashing thing had burst from the trees like a physical harbinger of the conflagration, and Junt quaked and swayed.

He saw his father's head-on collision with the leaping thing, saw it fall and spring back, saw Bimbisara's savage roll onward after it—and then saw a second nine-foot streak of amber and black fly from one side with claws reaching at the old tusker's right eye. Instinct, rage, male awareness, drove Junt like a boulder, somehow, between the two; the tigress struck the side of his head with such force that he went down on his knees and almost rolled over.

The tigress, who had not allowed for any obstacle, had ranged her clawing leap to reach Bimbisara's eye several feet beyond. She fell clutching, on her curved back, just under the young elephant's head, ripping with all four feet into his trunk so that he screamed . . . and then Bimbisara struck downwards at this new adversary, his nine-foot hundred-pound tusks driving with all his bulk behind them. One impaled the tigress's groin and dug two feet into the earth under her; she belched out an appalling, shrieking squall, thrashed with her feet, stretched and died.

Junt staggered up. He turned and squelched into the river, driving spray high. His world was melting in fear and pain. He had saved his father's life, for no blinded elephant could live. The young bull's injuries were slight, but terror almost paralysed him.

Before Bimbisara could drag his tusk free of the squashed tigress, her squalling death-yell sent her mate curving through the smoke above the old elephant's head to drop with talons and teeth deep in the back of his neck.

Bimbisara could not reach his assailant. The elephant heaved up from his knee, his feet hit the ground like pile-drivers, his trunk strained round, he began to run; the tiger reached down over his face and he trumpeted quaveringly in terror as blood poured from his forehead to fill his eyes. The tiger shifted its grip and deepened its bite.

Then two things happened. Whacking out of the jungle behind the Buddha came a house of smoke-edged flame, falling on

the statue, licking and curling away from its broken pedestal, consuming bushes with claps like thunder, hissing, fretting, jumping out and back, pouring like red water along the edge of the glade, racing up trees which curled and bent over cracking, whoofing into creeper-tangles that shrivelled and writhed, flickering out great tongues at the elephant with the tiger clawing inch by inch down towards his eyes.

At the same time, Lana, her short tusks upraised, brought down her trunk like a whip weighing half a ton, smash across the crouched tiger's back, which broke like a stick. Groaning, that molten mass of fur and muscle rolled down the old elephant's side and thumped to the ground, as another long feeler of fire reached out and singed the now helpless victim.

Lana cared nothing for fire, though Bimbisara backed, trumpeting shrilly. Lana remembered a new-born calf so soft with short grey fur, nuzzling at her belly; and she swiftly kneeled on the paralysed and twitching tiger—kneeled first with one knee and then the other, jumped up and down, got to her feet and danced with huge five-nailed toes on the flattened mass of blood and fur and crackling bones.

Round the back of the Buddha came a moving wall of fire, roaring with a greater voice than any forest beast, laughing and shouting, curling and panting and blowing and jumping; the stone seemed to turn red-hot, the trees curled up. The cow elephant backed several steps, stared as if she might charge the fire, glanced down at the tiger's remains and, turning, lumbered behind her lord into the river.

As the water met her burned hide, she flinched and grunted. In the midst of a mob of other creatures of all kinds, they fled through water that broke into a million reddened sparkles where swimming beasts and reptiles stirred its surface, while flocks of crimsoned birds poured shrieking overhead away from the crash and smoke of the jungle fire.

There were deer swimming, and panthers, pigs and an old ape; on one side the flat diamond head of a python cut through the water, other things swimming aside to give it space; overhead, at a point where the trees hung over the river, a column of monkeys was pouring into a swinging chain that, somehow, clutched a bough on the far side and formed a living bridge across which hundreds raced, some carrying young, all crying out and gabbling.

The two elephants pushed and waded and grunted; they got into shallow water, climbed through flats of reddened reeds; then the wall of fire hit the water on the side they had left, with such a roar and hissing and bursting of steam and soot that it seemed as if the world had exploded. And then the fire growled away up and

down river. On the other side, trees like hundred-foot torches sparkled and blazed amidst heaps of charred dirt and rolls of smoke. Gradually the conflagration died away, resolving itself into charring, glowing and dulling mounds of redness.

Bimbisara and his mate stood irresolute, in the depths of shadow among the trees, staring back towards the blackened country they had left. The fire had not jumped the river; the contrast on the two sides was very great.

Thirty feet deeper into the forest in their rear, looking in nervous arrogance towards them, Junt swayed, swinging his trunk, down which thickening blood was still running, clogging the pink finger-grip at the end. Junt lifted his trunk and tasted his own blood. It inflamed his little brain. He had fought a tiger. The tiger was dead. He was alive. The ploughed red furrows along his trunk were sore, stiff, agonizing, but the tiger was gone. Dead. Smashed. He opened his mouth and trumpeted in rage and pride.

On the other bank, the stone Buddha sat contemplating the chaos and destruction, the glowing embers and blackened stumps now once more silvering in the moonlight. The Buddha smiled. His sightless eyes had watched the murder of the little elephant, the slaying of the tigers, the sweep of the fire consuming tigers and elephant calf, trees, jungle and rushes. For hundreds of years the Buddha had sat there; these little sorrows came and passed; more elephants and tigers stalked below him; the jungle grew again. Life, mysterious, terrible, sweet, went on, and looking down on it the Buddha smiled.

Bimbisara and Lana, shoulder to shoulder, stared back at the destruction tumbled about the statue's knees. Their baby was gone. The tigers were gone. Lana turned slowly and looked behind them. Junt was gone, too. From far down the depths of the tree aisles came a distant trumpeting. Youth was challenging life and arrogantly and nervously demanding a life of its own.

Bimbisara and Lana turned deeper into the forest. A jungle debt had been paid. Some had died. One had begun to live. Ahead of them as they walked heavily down a trail on which their blood slowly dripped, the forest dawn was breaking on another day.

* * *

An Arab and his camel are inseparable. It's been said that an Arab would give up his wife rather than give up his camel. Personally, I haven't got a camel, but I think it's a great idea.

GROUCHO MARX

THE ST. GEORGE STORY

All this was so long ago it might have been yesterday

by CLIVE BURNLEY

ABOUT once a year a farm or a house would be set on fire, somewhere in the Chilterns, and anything that smelt like a roast would be picked out of the ashes and eaten, whether it was a man or pig . . .

The Chilterns were about ten thousand feet higher in those days.

"It's dragons," they said.

As soon as King Calceolaria the Inexpressible heard about it he acted. He was Emperor of Buckinghamshire except Little Missenden, Hereditary Lord of Ashridge Bottom and Baillie of Ballinger. And this was all so long ago it might have been yesterday.

The Act for the Extirpation of Pyrogenetic Saurians received the royal assent on the tenth day of Borax in the year two thousand and eleven of the Anteprandial era. It laid down that any man on giving proof of his having slain a dragon, should receive the title of Earl of Chalfont Junction, together with forty-eight quadroons (worth about half a million sterling at the present time) and the pick of the princesses.

Sir Convolvulus of Tyler's Hill was too young a knight to know much about Pyrogenetic Saurians, which were generally pretty scarce, but he knew a good deal about princesses, and it seemed to him a pretty fair offer. So when he heard that a cave just below the snowline on Ivinghoe Beacon had begun to emit smoke and was either a dragon's lair or a newly opened vent of the volcano then occasionally erupting at Aldbury, he buckled on his breastplate and two-handed sword and rode off to reconnoitre. (When he published his autobiography he called it Reconnoitring or Reminiscences of Reconnaissance.)

It was all so long ago : before the Jurassic, at the very least . . .

From the Royal City of Chesham he rode past the Crystal Castle of Ashley Green, the Emerald Fortress of Wigginton, and the appalling slums of Ivinghoe. From afar off, below the gigantic glaciers of the Beacon, he saw smoke curling from the mouth of a cave, exactly like the smoke that curls out of the mouths of railway

tunnels after a train has gone through ; although he did not think of it like this, because it was all so long ago.

I will have, he said to himself, the red-headed princess, the one with the dear silly little mole just at the neck of her blouse; and he clattered boldly up to the reeking cavern crying, " Come forth. Come forth, thou most Pyrogenetic of Saurians— ! "

What happened was Pyrogenesis ; dragons had never subscribed to the Great Gaddesden Convention of two thousand and six, which had forbidden the use of fire, water or atomic weapons as contrary to the Usages of Chivalry, and now a great scalding breath came roaring out of the cave mouth, so hot that the knight's Clydesdale threw his master and made off, panting, like the hart, for cooling streams, and Sir Convolvulus sat down heavily in the cave mouth, feeling like a tomato in a tin in the process of being sterilised.

" Another one ! " said a thin voice in a tone of great disgust, and Sir Convolvulus, looking up, saw a gigantic dragon, bending over him, snorting sparks from its nostrils like a railway engine—although it was so long ago he didn't think of it like that—while farther back in the shadows he saw a second saurian, apparently asleep.

" Another one ! " said the first dragon, " one more of 'em ! Soon as ever I sit down up they comes, one after another : ' Come forth ! ' they says, or ' Have at you ! ' or ' St. George for Ponders End ! ' They don't have any conversation and they don't even make a savoury, because sorting the meat out of all that tin is worse than picking the bones out of a kipper."

Sir Convolvulus recalled now how many other young men had gone forth to give battle to dragons : how after a decent interval their next of kin had petitioned the courts for permission to presume their death ; how their names had been added to the roll of honour in the Town Hall . . .

But one thing he was still serene enough to be puzzled over. " No conversation ? " he said.

" None at all," answered the dragon. " Apart from ' Come forth,' or ' Have at you,' not a word. So I huff, and I puff, and I burn them all up into a pile of fine white ash. You'll notice some lying about," he said, " although a lot of it blows away."

" How very lucky I called ! " said Sir Convolvulus, who was more than ordinarily quick-witted for his years. " How very fortunate I chanced to drop in. There's nothing in the world I like more than intelligent conversation. Where shall we begin ? Current trends in contemporaty lino-cuts ? The influence of wallpaper design on the Currant Bun Industry ? Spiritualism ? Perhaps your friend (or is it your wife ?) would care to join in also," he said, motioning towards the silent animal in the shadows.

"Ignorant," said the dragon, snorting so indignantly that a little flame like a bunsen burner's shot out of his nose—although it was so long ago that neither Bunsen nor his burners had been yet seen in the most farsighted crystals—"Ignorant, same as the rest. My friend," he says, "or maybe—"and here the dragon laughed a great solid ball of flame—"maybe my wife! Didn't they ever tell you at school that dragons was reptiles?"

"They said something about saurians," began the knight. . .

"There's Whitehall English for you!" said the dragon, for though it was so very long ago they had a Whitehall of their own. "Reptiles, that's the word . . . That's why we breathes fire, on account of our being cold-blooded, and not minding the heat. And that's why we sheds our skins, like snakes do, once a year; regular as clockwork on the fifteenth of Carborundum, every year, off it comes . . . and that ain't my friend, nor my wife . . . it's me, the skin I cast off last week."

"How very, *very* interesting," said Sir Convolvulus, "how really and positively illuminating. Do please tell me more."

"Well now," said the dragon, actually cooling off a little with pleasure, "I must say you *are* a better conversationalist than most of these youngsters who come trotting up here crying out, 'Have at you!' or 'St. Swithins for Chorlton-cum-Hardy.' I'm almost inclined to think I might be able to explain to you my theory that we dragons represent the Lost Tribes of Israel or the fifth layer of trapezoidal stones in the Great Pyramid of Antirrhinum . . . But the others," he said, "those other little stupids who come charging up here, they're just a plain nuisance, like bluebottles."

"There is nothing I'd like to hear more," said Sir Convolvulus with feeling, "than your theory that the dragons represent the Lost Tribes of Israel—I have *always* been inclined to that view myself—and as for those other little stupids, do you know, I really think I can rid you of the nuisance once and for all."

"The devil you can!" said the dragon, settling down for a cosy chat. "Now that's what I call talking."

It was certainly talking, for another three and three quarter hours.

Two days later Convolvulus rode triumphantly over Pond Park into the Royal city of Chesham: behind him on three pack-horses there was borne a great semi-transparent unmistakable thing, the skin of a dragon. "The battle raged for forty-eight hours," said Sir Convolvulus; "he was red with my blood and I was green with his; but I muttered the magic words and slit his throat from fang to fang."

"What magic words?" they asked.

"Aha!" said Convolvulus, "that would be telling."

King Calceolaria the Inexpressible was as good as his word;

Convolvulus became Earl of Chalfont Junction; a special customs duty on all goods imported from Middlesex was levied to raise the forty-eight quadroons: the princess with the dear silly little mole became his very own; and a seven day public holiday was proclaimed during which all the fountains in the city ran wine and Skottowe's Pond was filled with sherry.

In the following year, however—dragons ate very infrequently—the borough of Chartridge was razed to the ground by an undeniably pyrogenetic saurian, and all those who enviously ascribed Convolvulus's triumph to sheer luck were loud in their demands that he, as the only man who knew the magic words, should again go forth to do battle with the beast; to their intense surprise he did so most cheerfully—being the only man in the kingdom who knew that dragons were reptiles—and shortly after the fifteenth of Carborundum he once again entered the city of Chesham followed by three pack-horses carrying the flayed skin of a dragon, and again the fountains of the city ran wine and Skottowe's Pond was filled with sherry.

For six years this went on, regular as the calendar: Dragon Slaying Week became the most important public festival in the kingdom, even in the country, extremely popular with those who were in favour of roasting oxen whole, drinking Burgundy out of the village pump, and pulling all the stops out; visitors from other dragonless kingdoms flocked to the hospitable city, so that a lucrative tourist traffic grew up, and there was hardly a castle in the parish which did not advertise Fourposter and Breakfast.

But in the meantime Convolvulus, Earl of Chalfont Junction, was growing older; he was tired of princesses, having by this time a fair collection, and had taken to philately. Besides, he was no longer a good listener, and found it very trying to have to put up for several hours every year with the dragon's latest theories on Astrology or Nudism or Numerology, and it was in these circumstances that he founded the Honourable and Only Reliable Order of Saurian Slayers, universally known as *HOROSS*.

Convolvulus was, of course, Grand Master of Hoross; he selected the members with the greatest care and initiated them into the mysteries of Saurian Slaying. The order built a granite castle at Dunstable and another on Northchurch Common; their device of a dragon slayer, much later copied on the coins of this realm, appeared on their shields and on the pennants which fluttered above the town during the annual carnival of Dragon Slaying Week: and they appeared with skins so regularly, while their P.R.O's published such breath-taking accounts of their arduous campaigns, that they soon formed a military aristocracy within the kingdom. Their authority

wasn't even weakened by their defection at the Battle of Monk's Risborough during the war with Oxfordshire, when it was alleged they fled in a body.

For thirty more years the town of Chesham went crazy (imagine it !), regularly, without fail, in Dragon Slaying Week.

In the thirty-first year something went wrong.

A rather loutish young varlet, one Bogwort, living in Whelpley Hill, became convulsed with rage when, returning from his day's work as a goatherd, he found that his cottage, his wife, three children and valuable bitch Hannibal, had all been burnt to ashes by a Pyrogenetic Saurian in his absence. Hannibal was a pedigree animal which he particularly valued and since Bogwort had no particle of imagination he forthwith followed the dragon's tail marks right up to and into the cave on Ivinghoe Beacon, where the dragon, being by this time very used to having members of Hoross call on him, paid little attention to his arrival. Bogwort thereupon brought a woodchopper's axe down somewhat smartly on the saurian's cervical vertebræ and in three strokes had severed his unsuspecting head . . .

It was only the eleventh of Ammonia, fully a month before the legendary Dragon Slaying Festival in Carborundum, and instead of the usual member of Hoross entering Chesham on his charger, followed by the traditional three pack-horses, Bogwort came in on foot carrying the dragon's head slung over his shoulders on a leather thong. However, King Meconopsis the Hilarious, who had succeeded Calceolaria, not being himself a member of Hoross, went through the usual motions : creating Bogwort Earl of Bovingdon Dockyard, presenting him with forty-eight quadroons and a princess, and declaring the Dragon Festival open forthwith.

The City varlets were not loth to begin kicking the gong around and wallowed in wine from the fountains rather earlier than they had expected, though not more deeply than Bogwort, who as a country lad unused to these sort of temptations, was horribly drunk for a fortnight together ; nor was this the only manner in which sensitive citizens felt that the ceremonies fell short of those of previous years.

Rumours soon began to circulate from castle to castle, and at last it was plainly announced that Hoross had refused to admit Bogwort to membership, on the pretext that he had not made use of the appropriate magic words when slaying the dragon, but had done so while the beast was asleep, in defiance of all the Usages of Chivalry. At first there was a strong pro-Bogwort movement among those who saw this condemnation as an attempt by the aristocracy to suppress the worthy lad of humble birth, but in an impassioned oration from one of the turrets of the royal castle overlooking Chesham Broadway

Earl Convolvulus, the now white-haired grand old man of Saurian Extirpators, explained to a gathering of thousands of citizens exactly what Bogwort's ill-bred blundering might mean.

"The magic words," he said, in a voice trembling with emotion, "were not used. For that reason, henceforth, there will be *no* dragons in this land, ever again. The long cherished glory and prosperity of this famous city have left it for ever. Take down those notices in your lower turrets which read Fourposter and Breakfast or Full and Groaning Board. No more will friendly aliens from Berkshire and Middlesex, even from Kent and Essex, flock to your famous city on the seventeenth of Carborundum. Resign yourself to drinking water from the springs which shall never again spout Barsac. You in the ladies' hand-bag trade prepare yourself to face unemployment for no more shall you have material to build up the export trade in Genuine Saurian Reticules. Ruin, unemployment, even fuel cuts, are all that there is left. Need I name the man who brought you to this horrible pass?"

They saved Bogwort from an angry crowd by throwing him into a royal dungeon, where he spent the last fifty-two years of his life, passing the time by growing mushrooms in an atmosphere fitted for that specialised form of horticulture, and thus founding a fortune that put his heirs right in the front line of the new plutocracy when commercialism later got hold of the kingdom . . .

But old Convolvulus was right about Chesham. It started to go downhill from that time on. And it was a long time, oh, a hell of a long time, ago.

* * *

FOR FRIENDS OVERSEAS

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UNDERGROUND

This was a moment of achievement, a moment for triumph

by JEROME BARRY

HE was a mousy little man in shirt-sleeves, with a green eyeshade and black alpaca sleeves guarding his cuffs, and he crouched all day over his charts and diagrams in the draughtsman's room of the telephone company.

He loved his charts. They were clean and white and accurate, in a world that was confused, messy, savage and generally puzzling. When the construction department sent along a dog-eared, dirty blueprint, scrawled with untidy measurements in red, a report of happenings in the brawling world of action, Joseph Tierney eyed it with uneasy distaste. Quickly he took T square and triangle and lettering pen, and translated the untidy information into beautifully ordered lines and symbols on the great complex face of the chart.

Underground—U.G.—was Joseph Tierney's territory. He cared nothing for the aerial cables that swung in long sagging loops from pole to high pole—or, rather, that ran in straight red lines from one green dot to another on the spider maps. Someone else handled the spiders. Joseph Tierney dealt with "subways"—runs of many-celled tile ducts that burrowed through the blind tangle of mains and pipes and conduits, in the scrambled puzzle beneath the smooth pavement of every city street. And he dealt with U.G. cables—lead-skinned boa constrictors of six, ten, twelve hundred pairs of wires, that lay torpid in the ducts, digesting an endless meal of words.

They were almost alive to Joseph Tierney; his dust-brown head held all sorts of facts about them—much of what his charts knew and some of the things they had forgotten. He knew where manholes were, and what you would find if you lifted their lids. More than that, he could tap a square black toe just so far from the curb on a blank stretch of asphalt and say, "Dig down six feet seven inches and you'll hit the Main-Bushwick trunk."

It was odd to find himself talking about such things to Emma's new young man, for usually he spent his evenings in a kitchen chair tilted back against the gas stove, working out a crossword puzzle. Tonight he had slipped into the living-room to try to have a minute

with the radio, not knowing that Harry Coutts was waiting there for Emma.

"You really could do that?" Coutts asked attentively. He was a dark young man, with the air of one who listens sagely and acts on what he hears.

"To an inch," Joseph Tierney said.

"Ever any other kinds of cables in the telephone subways?"

"Sure. We lease ducts to the teleprinter people, for instance."

"And burglar alarm cables?"

"We certainly do. And fire alarm and—"

Mrs. Tierney, a stout, handsome woman, came out with Emma and banished her husband to the kitchen with a look.

Two weeks later, on his way home from the office, Mr. Tierney had a gun rammed into his ribs. Four men thrust him into a closed car that held some picks and shovels and a powerful pair of compound shears. They drove him to a house where he sat with dry mouth while two hours passed.

Harry Coutts came to him then.

"The Republic Bank is wired by the Hawkes Protective Company. You know where the Hawkes cable runs."

Joseph Tierney blinked. For his long years of work he had three things to show: two daughters and a small account at the Republic. He said, "You're fooling, Harry. Listen—you've been a guest in my home—"

Coutts said, "Plug in that iron, Whitey."

One of the men connected a small electric soldering iron.

"You know where that cable runs?" Coutts said.

"Yes," Joseph Tierney whispered.

"Now, think. Somewhere it must go under a place that's out of sight of the street. We can't risk a manhole. Think. And think quick."

Joseph Tierney dug his fingers into his dust-brown hair. He eyed the iron and trembled. He nodded. "In Gregson Street the duct goes under that patch of waste ground—"

Coutts telephoned. "Okay, Patsy," he told someone. "Eleven o'clock."

Mr. Tierney said hopefully, "If you cut the wires, you'll break the circuit and give the alarm."

"If we cut the whole cable," Coutts sneered, "they'll run in circles making up their minds where to go first."

Joseph Tierney dropped into the pit, lit eerily by a flashlight. For the first time in his life he looked at a real duct. Mr. Tierney laid a finger on one of half a dozen cold, dark pythons. "I think this is it," he said doubtfully. "Or ,no—no—it's this one."

On only one subject in his life had he ever shown cocksureness, and even that seemed to fail him now.

" Cut 'em all," Coutts ordered, his voice taut.

The compound shears bit their way through the cables, one by one, Joseph Tierney lending an ingratiatingly eager hand until he was pushed aside. Half way through the job the shears jammed, and it was minutes before they could be cleared. Finally the last cable lay severed.

" Do we finish this guy here," Whitey asked, turning the flashlight on Tierney, " or somewhere else ? "

" Take a pickaxe to him," Coutts said curtly. Tierney tried to run, but quick hands held him.

" Put 'em high up," said a voice out of the darkness. " You're under arrest."

" Wha—what—" Coutts gasped.

" They were just stupid, Sergeant," Joseph Tierney explained to the officer in charge of the policemen. " I chose this subway because it has the police cable in it. I had them cut that first, and then the fire alarm cable, and then I jammed the shears with a piece of scrap, so that when the central office began to go crazy the galvanometer men would have time to make out exactly where the break was and tell the police just where to come to. The Hawkes cable isn't here at all, of course. I thought this Patsy would have a rough time when he broke through the burglar alarms and found the Hawkes men right on his neck." He spoke, not exultantly, but with a preoccupied dejection.

" Patsy ? " the sergeant said, and looked at Coutts closely. " Well, yes. This is Patsy Ruotolo's gang ! Brother, you're due for a piece of luck. There's a reward . . . Well, for Pete's sake, that's nothing to start worryin' over ! What's bitin' you ? "

Joseph Tierney shook his head regretfully, and stared at the pit. " The first duct I've ever dug for," he said, " and it was a foot and a half out. First thing in the morning, I've got to check that chart."

* * *

BY ALL MEANS

Marry by all means. If you get a good wife you will become very happy, if you get a bad one you will become a philosopher—and that is good for every man.

SOCRATES

THE WEDDING

Oh ! what excitement,
Oh ! what a to-do,
what a running about,
what a displaying of presents ;
Oh ! what a gaggle of women,
what a mawkishness of men.

Oh ! what a shuffling in pews,
what a dropping of books,
what a craning of necks ;
Oh ! what a whiteness of bride,
what a redness of bridegroom,
what a blushing of bridesmaids,
what a grinning of groomsman ;
Oh ! what a thundering of organ,
what a pealing of bells,
what a clicking of cameras.

Oh ! what a popping of corks,
what a filling of glasses ;
Oh ! what a going upstairs,
what a changing of clothes,
what a saying farewell,
what a waving goodbye ;
Oh ! what a drive to the station,
what a time in the train,
what a trip in the taxi,
what a fetching of bags,
what a signing the book,
what a going upstairs ;

Oh ! what a closing of doors,
Oh ! what a turning of keys,
Oh ! what a shy maiden look,
Oh ! what a male urgent glance
Oh ! what a
Oh ! what
Oh !
Ah !

R. Don

★ *"The China Run" has been chosen by W. Somerset Maugham as a Book of the Year—a book, Mr. Maugham adds, which has not had the recognition it deserves. And we believe that our readers will welcome Argosy's decision to publish it as a two-part story. "The Biography of a Great-Grandmother," the author calls it, and we can only agree with him that the neighbours in nineteenth-century Banff must have found her altogether shocking. Of the writing H. E. Bates has said that it "has that same disarming simplicity that you find in Defoe, and the same triumph by means of artless detail."*

THE CHINA RUN

by NEIL PATERSON

I HAVE two portraits of her. One shows a young woman in gay apparel against a background of richly brocaded drapes. The gown is purple and of satin. It is cut low at the neck and is clasped to her waist by a wide bejewelled sash, while on her head, Arab fashion, is a scarlet shawl embroidered with white camels. She is standing with a hand on her hip and one cheek, so to speak, raised. It is a full-length portrait and you cannot see the face clearly. You can see, however, that the eyes are astonishingly blue and that the mouth is too large and wide, that the face is oval and is crowned, presumably, by red-brown hair, a tendril of which protrudes from the shawl in a small perfect curl, plumb centre and so meticulous that it fails altogether in its artistic aim of happy mischance and sits on the smooth, broad forehead with an air of grotesque permanency, rather like the tail on a piglet's bottom.

The stance, the tilt of the head, the brassy stare, and of course the dress are, to say the least of it, provocative, and I cannot but think that her neighbours in old Banff must have found it all very shocking. Even I cannot honestly claim that she looks like a Burgess of Banff, for in fact of course she does not look like a woman from our part of the coast at all: she does not look respectable.

The other portrait was painted some thirty years later and provides a measure of redress. The artist was John Ogilvie, of Banff, who was justly renowned for his taste, and he has certainly made a discreet job of her. She is sitting in a high-backed chair—Chippendale probably, but you cannot see the legs as the portrait ends in

the region of the lap—and for background there is a cream wall decorated with a copper warming-pan, three etchings, and a Nanking chop-bowl. She is dressed to conceal.

Black closets her throat and wrists and primly envelops the upperworks—no definite or undulating lines—so that the vulgar details of figure are quite obscured and your attention, consequently, must focus where it ought: on the face. It has not a great deal of character, this face. The forehead and jaw are good. The mouth, obviously painted with care, is firm and large and, I like to think, faintly humorous. The eyes are still startlingly blue, and every surrounding wrinkle has been copied, you feel, with painstaking attention to the original. You have no doubt that this is a photographic facsimile of the sitter, yet the result is oddly impersonal. It is the face of any peasant, on the brink of old age.

The two portraits now hang side by side, and if you are interested in this sort of thing you have an excellent opportunity of studying them for points in common. Personally, I can find only two. They are both in oils, and neither does her justice.

Little is known of her early life, and what is known is easily told. She was born in 1829 in a two-roomed house in Carmelite Street in the Royal and Ancient Burgh of Banff, and was baptized later the same year in the name of Christian West. Her father was Alexander West, erstwhile stay-maker and, at the time of Christian's birth, town missionary with a stipend of 16 bolls bear, 8 bolls meal, and £21 10s. 5½d. in money. Her mother's name was Jannet West or Gordon, and that is all that I can learn of her, although I have no doubt that she was a dutiful wife and a good mother.

The family consisted of Alexander, the eldest son who went to sea at eleven, deserted his ship in Valparaiso and was never heard of again; Janet (note the modern spelling), Bathia, Elspet, Jean and Christian, daughters in that order; and finally, and somewhat unexpectedly, one imagines, as he arrived in his mother's forty-eighth year, Robbie, the puir laddie that was born stunted.

In addition there were two sons who died in infancy and whose names, William and George, you may find on the family stone. There were others also, but they did not come to anything and, not having been christened, were disposed of without pomp or record.

No one appears to have noticed anything remarkable about the young Christian West, and one is forced to the conclusion that, as a child, she may have seemed as amiable, as estimable, and as dull as her sisters. None of them, Christian included, ever went to school. There was, of course, no school for girls in those days, and even Young Ladies, as distinct from girls, had to be sent abroad, sometimes as far as Aberdeen, forty-six miles distant, to be educated.

I am puzzled, accordingly, to account for Christian's education. One does not learn to read, write extraordinarily well, and to quote Latin at Sunday school ; one has better things to do.

The only explanation that I can offer is that her father, a scholar though a humble man, somehow found the time and place to instruct her. If this is so he must surely have got some inkling of her quality, and it becomes more surprising than ever that he did not boost her talents or show any sign of pride in her precocity. No doubt his wife persuaded him to keep it quiet. After all, it is not every hedge-sparrow that likes to have a cuckoo in the nest. They are too hard to dispose of.

At the age of sixteen Christian, unhandicapped by any reputation for brains, reached woman's estate, and promptly married. To the chronicler this marriage of Christian's is like the parting of a heavy curtain, for there is now an end to obscurity.

In the autumn of 1845 a strange ship, running before a south-easterly gale, rounded Kinnairds Head and, slipping into Banff Bay for shelter under the lee of the land, dropped anchor. She was a big ship for the bay, square-rigged and heavily sparred, black, lean-bodied, sinister, built for speed. It was rumoured she was an opium runner and curiosity rustled through the town. People collected on the foreshore to study her, and the following morning when word got about that the captain's gig was being lowered a crowd quickly gathered on the New Harbour Wall.

It was an inquisitive and eager crowd, a hotchpotch cross-section of the town, with the girls and tradesmen to the front. The five West girls were there, arms linked, agiggle, and when Captain Dai Evans, ascending the iron rungs, poked his dark head over the edge of the quay, it is possible that the first sight that met his eyes was the row of crinolined Sunday skirts belonging to the Wests.

He noticed Christian immediately, as well he might with her sisters to offset her, and a look passed between them. For a moment it seemed that he might speak, but, according to his own account, " becoming mindful of the proprieties," he gathered himself and proceeded on his occasions, namely a visit to the Black Bull Inn, where he knocked back two pints of strong ale, gave out that he was bound for Aberdeen with a cargo of tea and a badly sprung mainmast, and, after demanding the names of a reputable builder and a chandler, made discreet inquiries of the five sisters.

Later that gusty day he encountered them in full sail in Bridge Street, and his interest was so marked that the whole town heard of it. When they had passed he swivelled in his tracks and watched them till they rounded the bend into Reid Street.

" A trim ship," he said. " And she looks to be running free."

For two unnecessary days—for his sprung mast was quickly unshipped and a jury fitted—he stayed on at the Black Bull, probing the locals in a subtle Welsh way for information anent the Wests and unaware that the town buzzed with it. On the third day the wind was so fair that it could no longer be disregarded and, abandoning his caution, he sought an interview of Alexander West. Inns, naturally, were out of bounds to the missionary, and so the meeting took place in the living-room of the little house across the way from the burial-ground. The women retired to 'the other room,' where they could listen without being seen.

There was not much preamble. Captain Evans spoke his credentials and came to the point.

"Christian!" Alexander West said. "You mean Janet, sir. Christian is my youngest. You mean Janet, or Bathia perhaps."

"No, sir. The mistréss Christian."

"It is not credible. Christian is a bairn agin the others. No, no, I will not countenance it. Christian is unversed in the ways of men. It is out of the question, sir. Why, I would not give the child in marriage for a hundred pounds!"

"I had thought of two hundred," the soft, foreign voice said, while in the other room they stood rigid in an agony of suspense. "Sterling."

The parents were opposed to an immediate marriage, but Dai was insistent and Christian was willing. The wedding, in the informal Scotch form, took place that afternoon, and that same evening Mistress Evans, in Bathia's new bonnet and Jean's elastic boots, stood on the poop of her husband's ship, the *Dee*, while a fair wind filled the great spread of sail and the couthie little town of Banff, containing all that she knew, receded beyond her horizon. She felt no fear. Only excitement, and a certain satisfaction. She was fully aware of having done a host of rivals well and truly in the eye.

The *Dee* discharged in Aberdeen, loaded a cargo of grain and cattle carcasses, and proceeded to Cardiff without incident save that a fresh quarter breeze, springing up off the Lizard, made the ship lively and occasioned the following entry in the log: "*Mistress Evans is uncommon handy about the ship, even in weather, and would doubtless be of service if a man.*"

It is not the comment one expects of a bridegroom, but one cannot doubt its sincerity. Dai Evans did not joke. He was an intense and serious man, fiery on occasion yet with his fires subject to his will. His marriage was the one impetuous act of his life, and even in this matter, it will be recalled, he committed himself only after a careful investigation.

Prudence appears to have been the key-note to his character,

and prudence is a quality which may be known to different men by different names. Give him his due though, he rates more than back-handed praise. He was a good sailor and a good business man, conscientious in all his undertakings yet religious withal. He was masterly at prayers. Moreover—and for this alone we should honour his memory—he kept his log after the fashion of a Pepys and taught Christian to do likewise.

From Cardiff the *Dee*, later re-named against all seafaring practice the *Christian Dee*, sailed to Garwyth in Cardigan Bay. This was the home port, Dai Evans's town. He had a house here, a housekeeper, and a family of brothers. The house was big, the housekeeper old, and the brothers hostile save for Thomas, the youngest, who was much too friendly. The town itself was small, go-ahead, and passionately Welsh. It closed its ranks automatically against outsiders like Christian. In twenty years' time she might be accepted, but first she must bear her quota of Welshmen and adopt the chapel and the idiom: she must earn the right.

Under these conditions, and with her husband away nine months out of every ten, it is not to be expected that Christian was happy. Her only companion was Sarah Ann Griffiths, a disapproving old woman, and deaf to boot; and her essays into the town were punctuated with snubs, and met at best with the kind of cordiality that is bought in shops. There was no one to admire her new finery, and she would sit at the window overlooking the bay in a gown festooned with ribbons, her hair slicked and her hands clean as a lady's, with nothing better to do than twiddle her thumbs.

Sometimes she would weave on her handloom, and then the click and birr of the pirrin' pin would fill the austere room with a homely and companionable sound. She would write her sister Janet long, passionate letters in which she bared her heart on every aspect of her new life save one; and, tiring, she would sit for hours just staring out to sea where nothing stirred but an occasional white sail and a gull, perhaps, swooping across her field of vision. It was not the life for a spirited girl.

When her husband came home there was bustle and stir in the house. There were guests and elaborate meals. There were social outings and fashionable penny lectures at the chapel hall. There were concerts, and even dances. And above all there were the pleasures which Dai taught her to regard as sinful.

It is as unfair to blame Dai Evans for his attitude to sex as it is to blame him for being twenty-seven years older than his wife. Such a gap was, of course, considered not only convenient but ideal in those days when the world belonged exclusively to its males, and similarly, in that age and district, it was taken for granted

that a bedding was a dark and violent castigation of sin to be accomplished at the devil's prompting and with all despatch. It must have been provoking to a sensible and healthy woman like Christian, but she does not say so. She accepted her husband as she had accepted her parents. He was hers, to be made the best of. There is no criticism of him in her letters to Janet, and no hint of the intimacies of married life.

In all other matters relating to her years in Wales she is voluminously—even tiresomely—informative. We know that in 1847 she spent 11s. on six pairs white silken hose, and in 1848 7s. 5d. on 4 yards Spitalfields glacé silk. We know that in 1850 there were eighteen hoops in her new crinoline, and that she had gone in for something pretty special in the way of petticoats. We even know the colour of the horses that pulled the various tradesmen's vans. But we haven't the faintest idea what kind of time she had in bed. She couldn't tell Janet because Janet was unmarried. It would not have been proper ; and Christian was always proper.

Apart from this one omission the record of her years in Wales is amazingly complete, and it soon becomes clear that she did not yield tamely to the boredom that yawned about her. She girded herself with a pair of diversions, one of them reputable.

She read.

A catalogue of her reading during these years would extend over a dozen closely printed pages, and it must suffice to say that she waded through works as widely divergent as Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and the memoirs of Madame de Staël. She read voraciously, and with increasing acuteness. With the assistance of old Penryn Williams, the minister (of whom she writes to Janet : "*He has a prodigious library and, although invariably kind, is nevertheless more interesting and alive than is quite seemly in a man of his cloth*"), she carried through an extensive plan of education.

Her other diversion was less commendable. Discovering the amenities of the cellar, she acquired the habit of tippling. When her husband learned this he was exceedingly displeased, and the next time he went to sea he took her with him.

At this time the *Christian Dee* was running to the China Seas, in ballast or with a cargo of light timber and groceries, and returning with tea and rice. She had been designed twenty years before for the opium trade and, with a maximum of 8 to 9 knots on a bowline, was not able to compete successfully with the big Yankee and British clippers which had been built for the job and which had achieved a virtual monopoly of the tea freight. For some time Dai had been contemplating a change over to the South American nitrate trade where the money was less spectacular but the risks

infinitely less, and it was only his reluctance to ship a dirty cargo (slate for the Chilean ports) in his inlaid mahogany holds that had so long delayed his decision. Christian's first trip to the China Seas resolved his doubts. He couldn't get out of tea quick enough then.

It is a long run from Ushant to the Formosa Strait. On the outward passage it took the *Christian Dee* anything from a hundred and twenty to a hundred and sixty days; and that is a lot of days at sea. If Christian had been merely a passenger she would no doubt have got as bored as was the fashion in captains' wives afloat. But Christian had no intention of becoming a passenger. She meant to be a sailor.

To further this end she made herself as unobtrusive as a woman can ever be on board a ship. She listened demurely to the talk in the saloon where the mate or the second, depending on the watch, joined Dai and herself in a stiff-backed, uncomfortable meal. She stood by the hour on the weather side of the poop watching the hands at work—setting up and rattling down; reeving off new rovings; worming, parcelling, serving; turning braces and halyards end for end; drawing and knotting yarns; reefing, furling, making and trimming sail: the endless seaman's round.

She selected the specialists—the sailmaker, the carpenter, and the bosun—and with crisp, calculated questions picked their brains till she had a working knowledge of sails and spars and rigging. Then she turned her attention to navigation. It was something of a joke to the Captain. He couldn't have been more tickled if he had had a talking dog.

At first the weather was exemplary and for weeks the *Christian Dee* bowled along under all plain sail, with an average log of seven knots. She crossed the Line on the fifteenth of April, but struck unlucky with her south-east trades, and for four days in latitude 10 south lay all but becalmed while Dai studied the sky warily and fluted his canvas, whistling for a breeze. On the evening of the twenty-ninth small tight clouds began to appear like poised fists in the east, both watches were called on deck and sail was shortened.

Next day—the day that the first of the squalls hit them—George Somerville, the negro cook, was logged ill of smallpox and in considerable pain. By noon the ominous blisters had appeared on the soles of his feet and Dai decided that he must operate. George was a Liverpool negro who affected American manner and accent because he believed that "all classy negroes come from the States." He was a very large man. He had a hammock almost twice the usual size, and before he went sick there had been complaints that he and his berth took up too much room.

He was not an easy patient, and when he saw the razor he

screamed and turned his face to the bulkhead. He refused point-blank to be touched. He was a good cook and they were anxious to save him. They pointed out that he must have the soles off those feet or die. George said: "All right, suh, I sho chooses to die." They could not persuade him, and they could not coerce him; and when the squall struck they had more important things to attend to, and they left him to die.

Christian, who had been told all the circumstances, herself went for'ard to the fo'c'sle. She measured George ostentatiously with her arms, then she brought out a bolt of canvas and, squatting on the deck, cut it to size.

"That should serve very well, I think," she said, eyeing George speculatively. "All we need now is a sinker."

The negro watched her with rolling eyes. "I sho don' wanna die!" he said.

Christian produced a Bible and began to read the familiar service to the dead. She had not got very far when he stopped her.

"Tell them they can cut off my feet," he said. "But, missy, tell 'em George sho don't hold with pain."

"The operation will be painless," she promised.

She kept her word. While the *Christian Dee* rolled in the heavy beam sea and the deck above resounded with the clip of men's boots and the thud and scuff of booms and sails, she herself skinned the negro's soles with a razor cauterized over a hurricane lamp, swabbed away the pus, and bandaged the feet. As an anæsthetic she had used a weighted belaying-pin and this, having splintered on the negro's skull, she threw over the side on her way aft to her quarters, "*where*" (she records) "*whether from the buffeting of the sea or from reaction, I was for the first time ingloriously sick.*"

The incident caused a deal of talk on board. Officers and men eyed her with a new respect. She had shown something of her mettle.

The dirty weather continued for six days, then the trades settled in and, crossing the meridian of the Cape in 36 south, they ran close-hauled up a smooth Indian Ocean with light working breezes. The second week in May they reached the first of the islands that sprawl, like spilt pepper, over the charts of the narrow China Seas, and then, in soundings, proceeded with the utmost caution until they finally clewed up with the stately company of tall-masted clipper ships anchored off the Pagoda Rock.

Here, they took in water and provisioned ship, and here, in a series of genteel At Homes afloat, Christian met the ladies of the China Fleet, "*who*," she writes Janet, "*despite their happy circumstances without exception bemoan their lot and pine for civilization and the society of nice manners. As this, along with gallantries,*

comprises their entire conversation, I need hardly tell you that I found them tedious."

Then up the River Min to Foo Chow Foo, that teeming, malodorous river port which owed its wealth and much of its squalor to the illustrious tea of the hinterland. All day long buffalo trains converged on the city, bearing lacquered and enamelled chests of Bohea tea, and sampans similarly laden plied continuously down river to load the ships of the rapacious 'foreign devils' which lay moored in the stream.

It was here, in Foo Chow Foo, that Christian's portrait was painted. The artist was a Mr. Lee, a second mate who had stepped ashore the year the Nanking Treaty opened up the port to trade, and, becoming enamoured of a Chinese lady, deserted and set up house with her in an attic above the Flying Fish Inn, from which point of vantage he could paint the ships that sailed up the Min and, by the simple expedient of going downstairs, sell the finished articles to the captains when they called, as they invariably did, at the saloon below. The previous year he had made a tidy job of the *Christian Dee*, and Dai had therefore no hesitation in entrusting him with the commission to paint his wife.

It was here, too, and in the same connection, that Christian first met Tancy McCoy. He cuts a fabulous figure in Clipper history, this Tancy McCoy, and nowadays it is hard to sift the truth from the legends that surround him. He is variously described as 'the last of the buccaneers,' 'little better than a pirate,' 'a wild and dissolute character,' and 'the finest Yankee skipper that ever drove a ship in sail.' He had an abundance of friends, and of enemies; and I think it likely that his enemies were handier than his friends with the pen, and that the account of him which has come down to us has been distorted by personal dislike and envy.

Certainly it is undeniable that he was a hard-drinking and a fighting man, strong in the loin and not over-scrupulous in the way of business, and it is equally undeniable that he had salt water in his veins, that he carried canvas to the last and never lost a spar, that the men who sailed with him swore by him and were ready and eager to line up alongside any time he found himself against a wall. Whatever you may think of him you must allow him this: he was a great man in the China Seas by the standards of that time.

Of his appearance at least there is no doubt. Christian, descending the stairs from the painter's attic to the saloon, saw him as "*a tall, heavily built man, deeply browned by sun and wind, not ill-favoured yet with a reckless air, his cap on the back of his head, and a look in his eyes which I first took to be merry and half smiled to him in answer, but which I saw then to be most insolent, and could have torn the lips from my face in my chagrin.*"

"Yes," Tancy McCoy said. "Yes, ma'am, you should always blush. It sure is becoming. Turn around."

She goggled at him and he nodded encouragingly. "Turn around," he said, and before she realized what she was about she had turned. Tancy McCoy had that sort of influence on people. He was an authoritative man. "Yes, *sir*!" he said. "Yes indeed. You're somethin' pretty special for this place. You can knock spots off'n any of the last batch the Swede brought in. I'm Tancy McCoy, an' from now on for a bit I reckon it'll just be you an' me. What's your name, ma'am?"

Christian stood transfixed.

"Whisky!" McCoy said. "Rustle it up, Charlie. And give the little lady her own brand of poison."

At this juncture Dai, who had arranged to meet her at the foot of the stairs, fortunately arrived on the scene, and they left the saloon "to the accompaniment of a braying and guffawing from the louts who lined the bar."

It was not an auspicious meeting. Worse was to follow, for the next day Christian reports: "*Captain McCoy raised his hat to me in the street in an exaggerated fashion, which courtesy Dai was forced to return, and I, happening to glance astern, observed that this infamous character had brought about and was following, his hands in his reefer pockets, whistling a mocking air. He entered the Flying Fish close behind us and, on Dai's being engaged in conversation, whispered to me: 'I'll be waitin' for you, babe.' I counselled Dai to be at the bottom of the stairs prompt on twelve noon.*" (her sittings were from ten to twelve) "*and he engaged to be so, but on emerging from the painter's attic at noon, I found Captain McCoy sitting very much at his ease athwart the stairs above the first landing. He motioned me to sit down beside him and addressed me, saying that he wished us to have a little talk. On my disdaining to reply he laughed and told me to take the whalebone out of my corsetry, at which, incensed, I struck him with my clenched fist, simultaneously stepping over his legs and making my escape downstairs. I could still hear him laughing when I joined Dai, but I warrant that I hurt him. The knuckles of my hand are swollen half an inch. I did not tell my husband of the incident for fear that he would make a scene and inflict some grievous bodily injury on Captain McCoy.*"

She reckoned that she was rid of McCoy, but she did not know her man. Two days later, on the occasion of her last sitting, she mounted the artist's dais to find McCoy comfortably ensconced in an armchair by the window. She directed a hard glance at the painter and, helpless, he turned the palms of his hands to her.

"Please continue painting," she said.

She ignored McCoy, ignored all his attempts to engage her in

conversation. She was pointedly unaware of his presence and at last, exasperated, he struck his fist violently on the arm of his chair. "You rate yourself too high, ma'am," he said. "To the devil with you! I'll waste no more of my time, but first we'll see if temper'll thaw you. How much is the picture?"

The painter demurred.

"How much?" McCoy roared.

"Fifty dollars, but . . ."

"Here, take sixty."

This was too much for Christian. She ran to the door and called below for Dai, who came at the double just as Tancy McCoy was tucking the portrait under his arm. He caught Dai Evans as he charged, caught him by the throat and held him at arm's length, while Dai's fists flailed unavailingly to reach the big man's body.

"Easy there," McCoy said. "Easy. I'm ready an' willin' to make a widow of her, but are you, sparrow? That's the question, are you?" Without apparent effort he raised Dai off his feet and hurled the Welshman across the attic where he finished on one knee against the wall. Christian ran to him.

Tancy McCoy looked around the room and touched the peak of his cap. "Morning all," he said.

Dai got to his feet, brushing his coat, telling the world what he meant to do to McCoy the next time they met. Christian kept her face averted from him and, nettled, he swore volubly in Welsh. "Be reasonable, Chrissie," he said. "A giant like that. What could *I* have done?"

"A *gentleman*," she said, "would have drawn his knife."

She could be very cutting at times.

They lay in Foo Chow Foo for ten more days, loading a cargo of tea and rice, and overhauling sails and rigging for the race home. In the tea trade speed was the all-important factor, and the big clippers which might be expected to reach England with the first of the new season's tea had their bills of lading signed at £7 per ton as against the modest £2 at which Dai was glad to fill his hold. Nevertheless, like every other captain he refused to admit that any man had the legs of him, and each year his hopes soared anew that this trip would be his lucky one: he would escape a hurricane, he would strike a good monsoon, he would smell out a breeze while his rivals lay becalmed and, running free on brisk westerlies, race through the chops of the Channel with his flying kites set, to arrive first at Tilbury in a welter of glory and fat profits.

It could happen. It was every skipper's dream.

The *Christian Dee* was among the first to complete her loading, and on the eighteenth of June got away to a good start. She picked

up a fresh beam wind off Losing Island, but Dai did not like her trim, and would not crowd on canvas. Chests of tea and coils of rope were shifted aft in an attempt to ease her, but still she did not sit to Dai's liking and, on the twenty-ninth, he logs: "*Squally sky in the S.W. As she is still tender deemed it unsafe to carry royals and had the yards brought down to deck.*"

On the thirteenth a sail was sighted on the starboard quarter. She came up fast and was recognized to be the Baltimore clipper, the *Lady Caravel.* She was Tancy McCoy's ship.

Dai Evans immediately ordered both watches on deck. He shook out the reef in his mainsail and set the main topgallant sail. Under this press of canvas the *Christian Dee* bolted along at a spanking rate, but it soon became clear that the *Lady Caravel* was still gaining.

Everyone was on deck. Everyone was looking to the captain. Dai paced the poop, frowning, pulling at his chin. Finally he gave the order to loose the fore and mizzen topgallant sails.

"That should do it," he said to Christian.

The race was on now in grim earnest. For an hour the *Christian Dee* held her lead, then McCoy set his upper topgallants and again the *Lady Caravel* began to overtake.

"Shall I set the royals, sir?" the mate asked.

"No, no. Too dangerous."

The story of the portrait and the brawl had sped like a cat's-paw through the clipper fleet, and there was not a man aboard the *Christian Dee* who did not know the details of the outrage that McCoy had perpetrated on Mistress Evans. They lined the rail watching with narrowed, hostile eyes as the Yank crept up on the quarter. They did not think the Old Man would let him get away with this. Neither did Christian.

"You've got to set the royals, Dai!" she said.

He ignored her. He was in a towering rage, his lips twitching as he walked with short, staccato steps from the steering compass to the mizzen rigging.

"He's overtaking fast," the mate said.

"Keep your mouth shut, sir!"

"Set your royals, Dai!" Christian said sharply.

As if in answer Tancy McCoy loosed his main royal and ran it to the masthead. It was the only answer she got.

"Is it mad he is? He'll have the spars out of her," Dai said.

Christian gave him a long look, turned on her heel, and went below. Her diary for the day contains a single and apparently unrelated sentence: "*I cannot stomach cowardice,*" she writes.

From her cabin port she saw the *Lady Caravel* come abeam, saw Tancy McCoy brandish her portrait aloft, and imagined she could hear his mocking laugh roll out across the two cables that

separated the ships. She slammed the deadlight down over the port and threw herself on her bunk.

An hour later a hand knocked on the cabin door. "The Cap'n's compliments, Mistress Evans, and you are required on the poop."

"My compliments to the Captain," Christian replied, "and I will come on deck when the royals are set."

The royals were not set. She did not go on deck.

She did not go on deck for the whole of that passage, and as far as is known she did not address a single word to her husband until the ship docked in Cardiff 127 days later. Then, sweeping to the Garwyth Chapel on Dai's arm, dressed in black velvet shot with orange, an ostrich feather in her hat, she presented the picture of a most gracious and devoted wife, and the *Garwyth Times*, which never failed to comment on the return of a sea-captain, reported that "*Captain and Mrs. Evans, who have just returned from the China Seas, are ambassadors singularly well-suited to uphold our national prestige in foreign parts. Granting an interview to our reporter in their handsome bayside residence . . .*"

Dai Evans was a jealous and a cautious man. He recognized a red light when he saw it, and as a direct result of this unfortunate voyage decided to cut adrift from the tea trade. For the next four years the *Christian Dee*, refitted, carried slate from the Welsh quarries to the west coast of South America: to Pisagua, Iquique, Tocopilla and Antofagasta, where she loaded the incongruous product of the bleak and sterile Chilean desert: nitrate: nitrate enough to fertilize all the gardens of Wales.

The logs of these years in the west coast, or W.C. trade as they called it, make fascinating reading, and the detailed, day by day account of the long passages round the Horn leaves us with a vivid impression of the problems and hazards that beset the seaman in sail: williwaws, the fierce, heavy squalls of the Straits of Magellan; the vicious easterlies off the Horn, that graveyard of fine ships; the sudden west-coast trembler; the *terremoto*, which flushes the sea into a seething cauldron, hot to touch; the tidal wave which may lift a ship anchored in twenty fathoms and hurl her half a mile inshore; the physical strain of three—aye, and five months of four hours on and four hours off; the cramped living conditions; the indiscipline (usually in the vicinity of the Line) with the resultant floggings and bad blood; the food—the black bread, the salt junk and harness beef, the rotting potatoes; the diseases—scurvy, yellow and breakbone fever, smallpox, pellagra, beriberi.

It was not much of a life, one would think, even for the tough sea-dog of the day. Yet Christian, a slip of a girl, exulted in it.

At first she occupied herself mainly with navigation. It has been said that navigators are born, not made, and this is largely true, for, though any man can learn to take and read his observation and work his sum from formulæ, it is not one man in a thousand who is correct to a hair's breadth, and not one man in ten thousand who is always correct. But Christian was, and Dai soon stopped laughing at her parlour trick with the sextant. He no longer found it funny. He found it humiliating, and it was a long time before he got used to the uncomfortable idea of his wife's ascendency.

His chagrin was eventually replaced, however, by a genuine pride, for in the summer of 1858 we find him writing in his log: "*Mistress Evans fixed the longitude by a snap of Procyon which emerged briefly from a cloud-bank and was not visible for more than three seconds. She has undoubtedly a genius for precise navigation and mathematical calculation, and has devised a method of minimizing error in a position due to error in the observed altitude which, when published, should be of value to all mariners and will bring credit to our name.*"

Having mastered navigation, Christian turned her attention to the art of sailing, and here too she built on a flair, for right at the outset she had the 'feel of the ship'—that instinctive timing which is the hall-mark of the artist in sail, and the lack of which has cost many a master his spars. On the second trip to the W.C.S.A. her writing appears with unfailing regularity in the scrap log, and from the rotation of hands—the mate's, then the second mate's, then Christian's—it becomes clear that even at this early stage she had assumed the responsibility of taking a watch at sea.

At the end of the outward passage the second mate deserted. He may have resented Christian's new status. Second mates are notoriously touchy. On the other hand, as by all accounts he was not much of a seaman, and as it had been a grilling voyage, he may merely have decided for an easier life.

He was not missed. One of the for'ard hands took over his duties aloft and Christian became second mate of the *Christian Dee*, a berth which she filled admirably and which she held until the time of Dai's death.

This melancholy event took place off the Falkland Islands, suddenly, on the 18th of September, 1858.

"*Dai had,*" Christian writes, "*for some time been suffering from abdominal pains and after breakfast on the morning of the 18th retired to his bunk with a severe stomach-ache which he attributed to the bad beef. I was standing the forenoon watch and shortly after six bells Mr. Griffiths (the mate) sent for me, saying that the Captain was calling out and in great pain. I straightway went below, but as I entered he was seized with a convulsion of such proportions that it*

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hurled him clean off the bunk on to the deck. While we were raising him his poor body arched like a bow, and when we laid him on his bunk we saw that he had departed."

No sailing ship in the vicinity of the Horn would tempt Providence with so potent a Jonah as a corpse, and that same evening the body was consigned—not without some difficulty—to the deep. It was blowing half a gale, and Christian, finding that her voice would not carry above the skirl of the wind in the ratlines, handed over the Bible to the mate. Twice, at the appropriate stage in the service, the remains, in their weighted shroud, were launched overboard, twice to return as the ship heeled over in a squall so that the corpse, slithering about on the deck, had to be recovered like a hat on a windy day. It seemed foolish to read the service yet a third time and, as if by common consent, all hands fastened on the unfortunate body and, somewhat out of temper, vigorously despatched it.

Christian thus became owner and assumed command of the *Christian Dee*. She was twenty-nine years of age, and had been five years and four days at sea.

Iquique, the main nitrate port, was a notorious eyesore, so ugly that in 1868 even a long-suffering God could bear the sight no longer and sent an earthquake to obliterate it. It was a town of wooden shacks clamped against nature on a slag hill, threatened by sand and sea alike, ankle-deep in bilious, yellow guano dust, infested with flies, and under siege from clinkstone and soda sulphate that fell in a continuous bombardment from the bleak and arid pampas above. There was no fresh water, no tree, no blade of grass within a hundred miles. There was no harbour, no bay even. The ships lay in an open roadstead with a surf-beat shore, and all loading was done by lighters from a dilapidated landing-stage.

This was the *Christian Dee*'s destination, and it was here, off Iquique, that Mistress Evans threw her main yards aback and dropped her first anchor since taking over the ship. Immediately the vessel had her chain the touts and boarding-house runners came alongside and, emboldened by the news of the captain's death, boarded her and even swarmed up the rigging to project their high-powered sales-talk at the men still working aloft.

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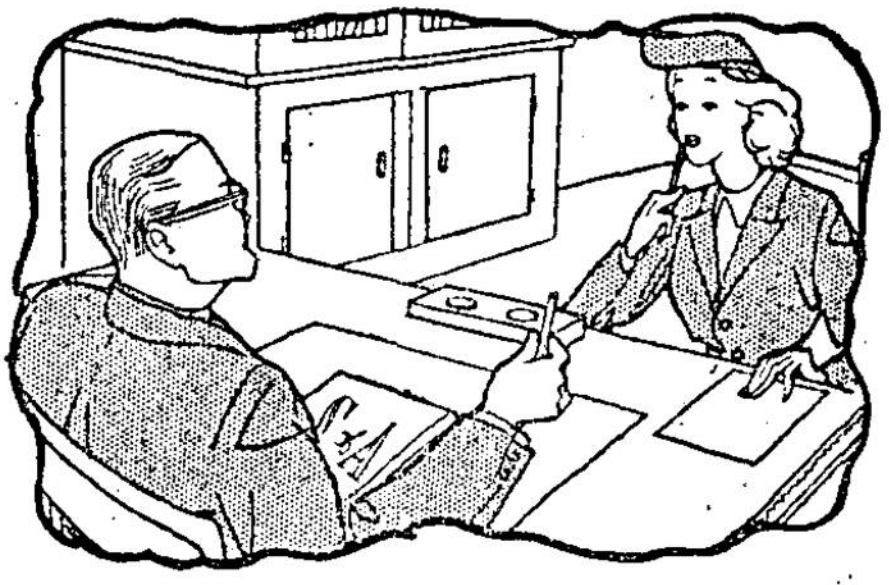
About Success in Authorship



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Christian heard the commotion and came on deck. "Get off my ship!" she said.

They ignored her.

"Thomas," she said to one of the seamen, "fetch me a musket." With the weapon in her hands she addressed the nearest runner, a swarthy gentleman who was sowing disaffection in the mizzen-mast. "You," she said. "Lay down out of there!"

He paid no attention.

"This is your last chance. Lay down and get off my ship!"

"Oh, go to bed with a guano bird," he said over his shoulder, and resumed his hawking.

Christian raised her musket, took careful aim, and fired. The bullet shattered his arm, and his friends, rising like crows at the report, flocked over the side and were gone in a matter of seconds. "*I do not regret the incident*," Christian writes, "*as it was greatly applauded by the crew, some of whom had previously become so restive that I had feared it might be necessary to order a flogging, a measure which I may now postpone, having shown them plainly that I am master and will brook no insubordination.*"

The nitrate works sympathized with her in her tragic bereavement, and the manager of the *Oficina* himself came off in a boat to offer condolences and, behind her back, a shore billet to the carpenter.

Christian gave him short shrift. She was as suspicious as only a widow can be, and she had discovered that her cargo was underweight. She was in no mood to listen even to reasonable excuses, and she was impervious to Latin-American charm. Granted he had filled the hold, but did he really think she was as green as the stuff he had packed there! Green. Yes, green as a young tree, and liable on that account to ten per cent shrinkage on the passage home. She would stand no criticism of her dunnaging or stowing. She demanded that he remove the entire cargo and reload with nitrate, repeat 'nitrate.' The manager could not agree to this. She already had first-quality nitrate. He could not possibly reload. He was sorry but adamant.

"It is deeply regretted, señora."

"It will be much more deeply regretted," Christian said.

That afternoon her boat's crew rowed her to the other ships in the anchorage—a barque, two schooners, and a brig—all Welsh, all nitrate ships. She spoke to their captains and found them sympathetic—it is doubtful if she would have found them in the slightest degree sympathetic if she had not been an attractive widow—and a common course of action was decided upon.

The following morning a message was received from the *Oficina*, deploring the incredible error and informing Mistress Evans that a special cargo, selected by the management in person and offered

at a reduced rate, was ready for loading at her convenience.

In reply Christian despatched a curt note demanding a loading party (an unheard-of luxury) *immediately*. Twenty Chilean rotos were sent out with the lighters and, the manager of the *Oficina* himself supervising, the loading was effected in record time. The widow was mollified, "*feeling*," she somewhat naïvely comments, "*that in the end I had not been unduly imposed upon.*"

The *Christian Dee*'s last night in Iquique was marked by an incident which, with variations, was to recur several times in Christian's life afloat. She was, it must be remembered, a young and presentable woman, described in Mr. J. D. Munro's book, *Clipper Captains*, as "a singularly attractive girl, with a proud head and sensuous carriage," and even had she been as plain and short-sighted as her sisters she would still, ship-borne, have been an object of desire. She was a woman, and that was enough.

Clifford Griffiths, mate of the *Christian Dee*, was a sober, inoffensive fellow, but the night the loading was completed he fell in with the master and mate of the *Gwinneth Jones*, who were known drinking men. He accompanied them to 'One-thumbed Pete's,' where he was prevailed upon to toast his late captain in *aguardiente* and *anisado*, and, by the time this was consumed, Mr. Griffiths was in a ripe condition, ready for anything.

What actually happened is not too clear. Mr. Griffiths was persuaded—with difficulty, for he was a large and powerful man—to return on board and was bundled into his cabin. Ten minutes later there was a great commotion and the fo'c'sle hands heard Mistress Evans calling out. When they went aft they found her at the foot of the gangway, in night attire and fluttering about in some agitation.

She kept clapping her hands for help. "Steward, steward, come quickly!" she was calling. "There's been a dreadful accident. Mr. Griffiths has hurt himself."

The mate was found lying across the doorway of her cabin, a lump the size of a duck's egg on his forehead.

Little was made of the incident on board, but several months later tongues began to wag when Clancy Vaughan, a sea-lawyer if ever man was, went aft in a mutinous spirit "to git justice, see if I don't" and was served with the same sort of accident, Mistress Evans summoning assistance by clapping her hands and calling excitedly; "Steward, steward, come quickly! Clancy Vaughan has hurt himself."

The following year, a Swede, a great lady's man on his own showing, was signed on at Antofagasta. The crew made no attempt to restrain him when he decided on a midnight sortie to the captain's quarters, and he too met with an accident which resulted

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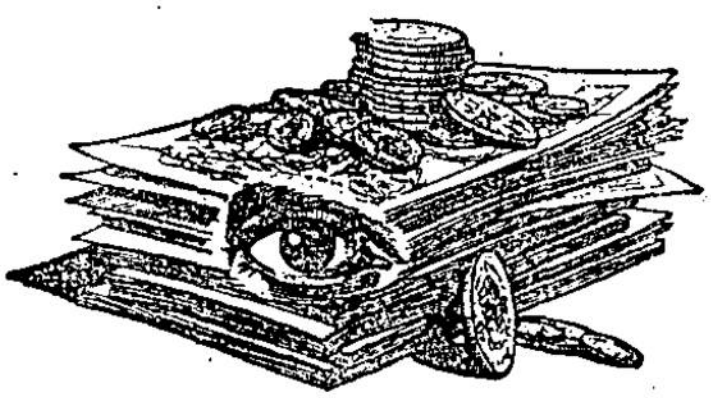

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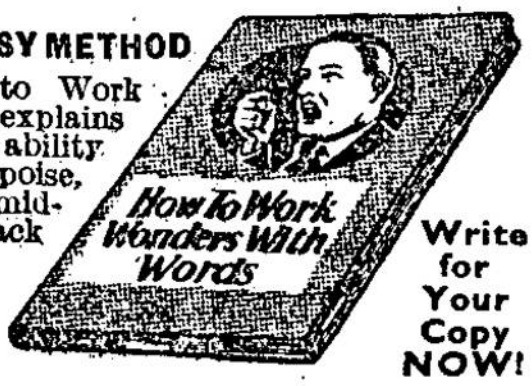

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in his being carried up the gangway feet first.

These accidents were all characterized by head injuries and by the manner in which they were announced, Mistress Evans on each occasion dickering about in a very feminine and helpless fashion, clapping her hands for attention and calling: "Steward, steward, come quickly! There's been a dreadful accident. So-and-so has hurt himself." The order of the words never varied. It was simply the captain's formula, and was respected as such.

Christian herself, as one might expect, has little to say of these misadventures. In a letter to Janet, the first page of which, unfortunately, is missing, she writes, however:

"*I sent for him next day*" (Mr. Griffiths, obviously) "*and, as he had no recollection of the matter, gave him an account of it. The poor fellow was greatly distressed and put about and had some fear, I think, that I might reduce him and send him for'ard to the fo'c'sle. While he was in this frame of mind I took the opportunity of informing him of my decision to make young James Jones, the liveliest hand of the larboard watch, my second mate. Feeling the need for frank conversation, I told him, thus increasing his discomfiture as you may imagine, that I had for some time past noted that he regarded me with admiration and that he had, on occasion, been prone to deal harshly with this or that young seaman whom I had favoured with a smile.*

"*I explained—and you will have no difficulty in believing it, dear Janet—that such smiles were administered not as a woman but as a superior, and were as much part of my office as orders to the helmsman. I assured him that, although it had not pleased God that I should return his feelings, I had nevertheless a high regard for his qualities, and I pointed out that he already shared an intimacy with me greater than that enjoyed by any other man. I counselled him, therefore, to be content with his lot, and this he declared himself already to be with so many sincere professions of his respect and loyalty that I am satisfied the matter has been well resolved.*

"*I fear, Janet, that you may conceive me to have been forward in this, but I would earnestly beg of you to remember that in this life to which I have been called it is not possible, or indeed advisable, always to conform to the ladylike conventions in which we were reared. I have another confession to make, but I will not have it to be sinful, for, as the good Lord has seen fit that I should usurp the functions of my deeply lamented husband, it cannot be unseemly that in the execution of his duty I should appropriate certain insignia of his authority. In any case—and I implore you not to be shocked—I am wearing trousers. I know that Dai would not have countenanced this during his lifetime, but I am confident that he will now have a fuller understanding of the problems that beset the sailor in skirts, and the inconveniences, nay hazards, of petticoats at sea.*"

At this time of the year—autumn—no voyage round the Horn was ever without incident, and the *Christian Dee*, running before a norther with shortened sail and two men at the wheel, struck a full gale in latitude 50 south and had to be hove to.

For forty-eight hours it blew like scissors and thumb-screws and she would not carry canvas. No sooner was a sail set than it was rent from clew to earing. The mizzen topsail was reduced to ribbons. Stays, shrouds, and halyards parted like cotton. The fore topmost staysail and the main foresail, in shreds, flayed and scourged the air like cats-o'-nine-tails, and the main royal, working loose of its gaskets, streamed out to leeward like a weighted pennant, whipping the mast into a fearful curve as though it had been as slender and as supple as a dowsing rod.

The apprentice, a second cousin of the mate, leeched himself on to the rigging to secure the royal, but was so lashed about the face and arms that he could not hold on, and, blinded, was hurled with such violence to the deck that his leg was broken and his ribs stove in. The chicken-coop, with its precious cargo of poultry, was carried away, and the sea that took it was so solid that no one even saw it go. Two new spencers were bent on to the fore and main spencer gaffs and the ship rode to these scraps of sail, taking it green, now standing up on her stern, now lying over almost on her beam ends, tossing and pitching fit to shake the sticks out of her.

Christian did not leave the deck. Muffled in streaming oilskins, protected only by a weather cloth triced up to give a lee, she stood the gale out, nursing the ship's head up to the seas, issuing her orders by megaphone and leaving the binnacle only to lurch to the companionway to consult the barometer, calculate drift, and drink an occasional cup of hot coffee.

On the third day the wind eased somewhat, and, as the glass was rising, she squared away under a little canvas which she was quick to increase, inch by inch, as the opportunity offered. For weeks, after the Cape was rounded, the log shows a hard beat to windward under reefed topsails and fore topmast staysail, then in 25 south, after a spell of variable winds, they picked up the south-east trades, and from then on, apart from a five-day calm in the Doldrums, it was plain sailing with Christian crowding on canvas in accordance with a new sail-plan which entailed a greater press of sail than the old ship had ever known, and under which she bowled along right merrily, rattling out her line like a steamer's. The tide was on the turn as she came abeam Hartland Point, and she raced up the Bristol Channel on the flood.

While the ship was unloading in Barry Docks, Christian, sitting by her open port, overheard a conversation between the carpenter and the gaffer stevedore.

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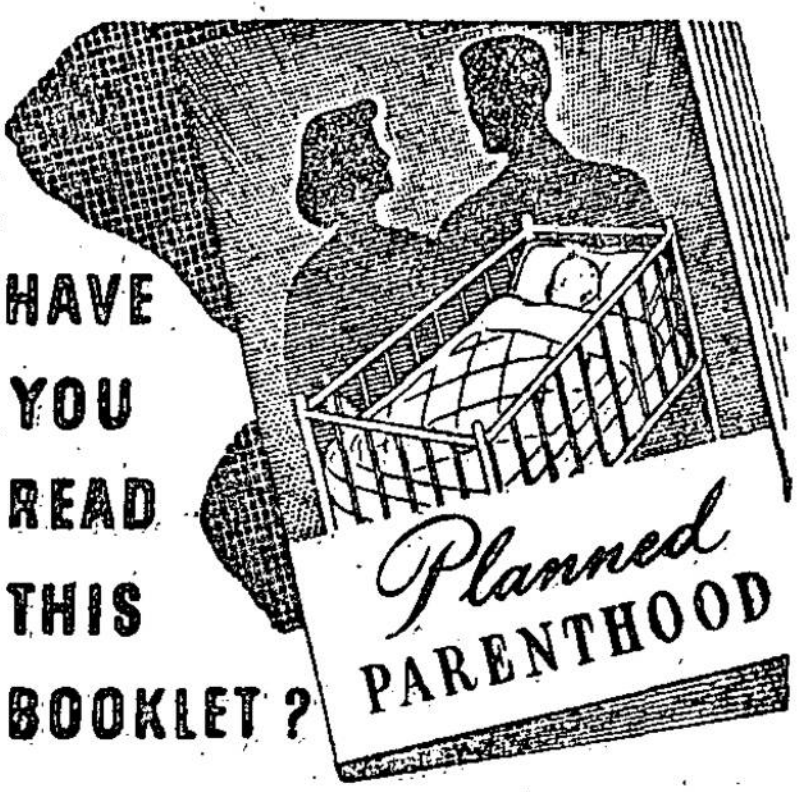

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"A woman for Old Man!" the gaffer said. "Holy God, you should be all right."

"I dunno," the carpenter said. "She's skeely, man. I tell you, she's a hard case."

Christian knew then that she had made the grade. Overcome, she hid her hot face in her hands. She even confesses to having wept a little. I doubt if any fashionable beauty ever heard a compliment that pleased her half so well.

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ANSWERS to FIND THE LADY! on page 38

1. *Portia, in "The Merchant of Venice," by William Shakespeare.*
2. *The Duchess, in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll.*
3. *Scheherazade, in the traditional Arabian Nights.*
4. *Mehitabel, in "archy and mehitabel," by Don Marquis.*
5. *Lady Blakeney, in "The Scarlet Pimpernel," by Baroness Orczy.*
6. *The Bride of the Riccardi, in "The Statue and the Bust," by Robert Browning.*
7. *Mme. Fauquet, in "Cabbage Holiday," by Anthony Thorne.*
8. *Pertelote, the hen, in the old story of Chanticleer and the Fox, told in the Nun's Priest's Tale, by Geoffrey Chaucer.*
9. *The mother, who was mortal, in "The Forsaken Merman," by Matthew Arnold.*
10. *Olive Oyl, in the Popeye cartoons created by Dave Fleischer.*

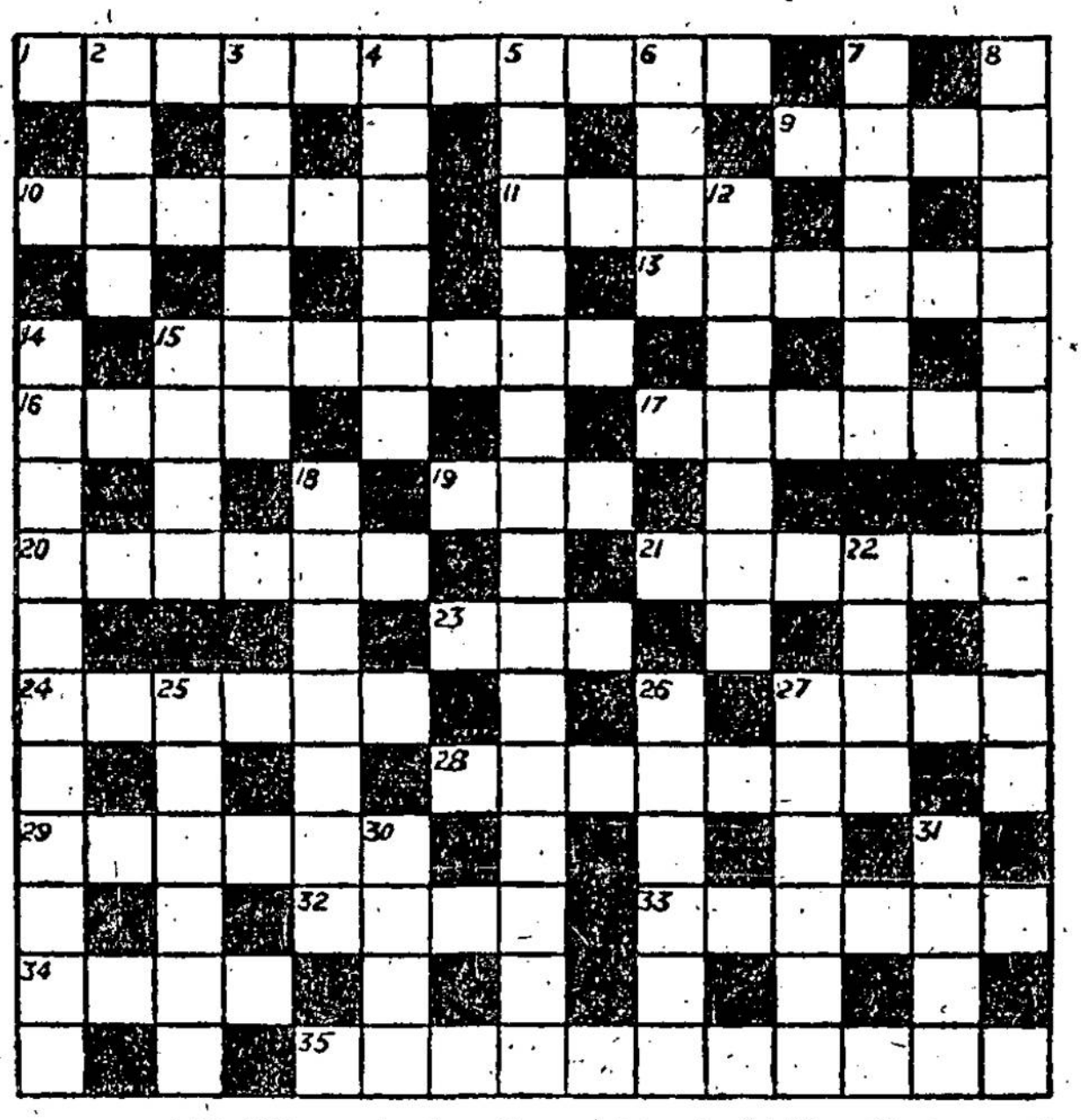
SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 128

Across. 1, Accountable. 9, Cows. 10, Spring. 11, Oafs. 13, Topper. 15, Dubiety. 16, Ewes. 17, Bellow. 19, Tab. 20, Tippet. 21, Benito. 23, Ash. 24, Minute. 27, Tees. 28, Mallard. 29, Rugger. 32, Deck. 33, Ingots. 34, Idol. 35, Stethoscope.

Down. 2, Copy. 3, Odious. 4, Noggin. 5, A postman's jacket. 6, Lift. 7, Compel. 8, A screw loose. 12, Sobered. 14, Betty Martin. 15, Deep. 18, Settled. 22, Iced. 25, No good. 26, Albino. 27, Tragic. 30, Rest. 31, Step.

ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 127



CLUES

Across

1 A nobleman in a telegram is held responsible (11).

9 The last half of 17 Across is what they do (4).

10 Well in season ? (6).

11 Piece of furniture broken up for louts (4).

13 Not necessarily the hat for the friend of two ghosts (6).

15 Buy diet (Anag.) (7).

16 Live stock (4).

17 Shout you get under about fifty (6).

19 The little label in 1 Across (3).

20 A cape seems to hint at the favourite (6).

21 I discovered there was no bite about this dictator years ago (6).

23 "More black than—buds in the front of March" (Tennyson) (3).

24 Note the insignificant amount of time (6).

27 Little heaps of sand in a river (4).

28 Bird with a greasy tail (7).

29 When playing it, you don't require the first half (6).

32 Ornamental part of the ship ? (4).

33 You'd expect such bars to sing themselves (6).

34 Worshipped in Bushido lore (4).

35 When it listens, it is better that no one should say anything unless just under a hundred (11).

Down

2 A work of no great originality (4).

3 Odd promises to pay without a penny are hateful (6).

4 If this measure lost one letter, one sort of liquor might be barred (6).

5 No, this is no coat of mail (1, 8, 6).

6 It will get even a sluggard up quickly (4).

7 "Whosoever shall—thee to go a mile, go with him twain" (New Testament) (6).

8 If you have it, being tight won't improve your mentality (1, 5, 5).

12 In this way to be a Communist is less reckless (7).

14 With my eye she is all nonsense (5, 6).

15 Profound ; or just artful ? (4).

18 I have arranged the way I prefer the weather (7).

22 Sometimes cakes and sometimes highways (4).

25 A couple of useless words (2, 4).

26 Could he be anything but fair ? (6).

27 Cigar comes back with some tea. Oh, very sad ! (6).

30 "—, perturbed spirit !" (Hamlet) (4).

31 Your pets cannot be in this with you, though in a way they are in it (4).

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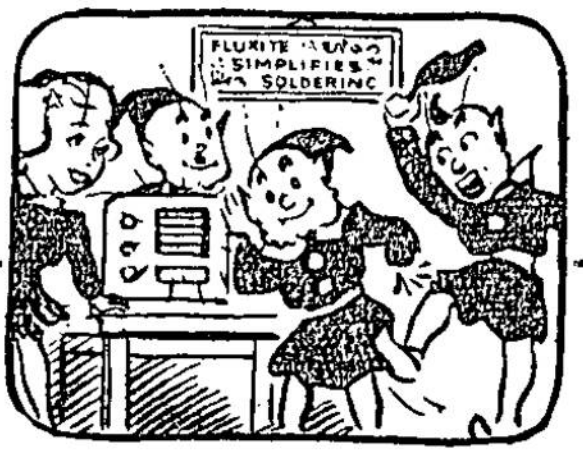

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